

Don't Forget The Dry Cows

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DALLAS, Texas — What happens to the dry cows on your farm?

Are they put in a back pasture and left to fend for themselves? Or do you treat their care as an investment in your future?

Many times, dry cows don't receive enough attention. Since they aren't contributing to current cash flow and profit, they may be given poorer quality feed or their rations may not be formulated specifically to meet their needs.

Body Condition Score

Proper management of the dry cow begins at the end of the cow's previous lactation. For years, you have been looking at cows and saying they are too thin or too heavy. In recent years, we have begun to quantify condition using a body condition score of 1 to 5.

A condition score change of one

unit is approximately 120 pounds of bodyweight. During late lactation, cows should have a condition score of 3 to 3.5. During the dry period a cow's condition score should be 3.25 to 3.75.

Overconditioned dry cows are 2.5 times more likely to develop cystic ovarian disease, 7 times more prone to foot problems after calving, and 2.8 times more likely to develop a reproductive problem during the next lactation compared to herdmates in good condition.

In addition, cows which lose body condition during the dry period are at a greater risk for dystocia and for culling in the subsequent lactation.

Dry Cow Treat

Another important management tool is dry cow treatment: Dry cow treat all quarters of all cows after the final milking of the lactation, and use a product that is specifically designed for dry cows. DO NOT

use a product designed for lactating cows.

The advantages of dry cow treating are many. Among them are:

- The cure rate is higher than dure' lactation.
- No discarded milk.
- Minimized risk of antibiotic contamination of the milk.
- More persistent antibiotic formulations can be used, improving the chance of success.
- Damaged tissue has time to be repaired before freshening.
- Decreased incidence of clinical mastitis at freshening.
- Prevention of new infections during the dry period.

Grouping

Separate dry cows into a minimum of two groups — a far off and a closeup group.

The far off group consists of cows from "dry-off" to two to three weeks before calving. The

close-up group includes all cows within two to three weeks of calving.

The far off group may be further divided into a group that needs to gain weight and a second group that needs to maintain their weight. DO NOT put cows on a diet to lose weight.

Feeding

Feed cows in the far-off group rations that contribute to development of the rumen musculature. This includes some long-stemmed forages that are high in fiber. Providing plenty of fiber during the dry period can minimize postpartum digestive problems such as displaced abomasum (DA).

Reduced dry matter intake usually occurs during the last two to three weeks prepartum. Thus, increase the nutrient density of the ration to maintain the desired quantities of protein, energy, minerals and vitamins.

Avoid drastic changes in the postpartum ration by introducing feeds of low palatability (certain fats and animal proteins, for example) into the ration during the late dry period. Also feed at least most of the post-calving feeds during the late dry period.

This does not mean you should feed the lactating ration to the close-up cows without modification. Check with your nutritionist to see which feeds might be detrimental to dry cow health and avoid using them for the dry cow ration.

Dietary Cation-Anion

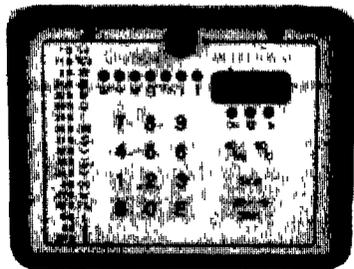
Recently we have been hearing about the positive effects of feeding rations with a negative dietary cation-anion difference (DCAD) to dry cows.

Cations are positively charged ions and anions are negatively charged ions.

Feeding negative DCAD rations

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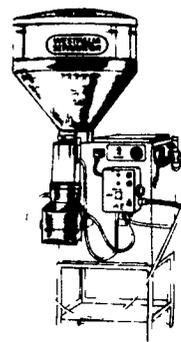
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