

# Glenn's Udderings

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## Getting Cows Off To A Good Start In Lactation

Most dairy producers want their cows to peak well, have good persistence of production, and breed back well. Getting cows off to a good start in their next lactation requires attention to several areas of management: the heifer program, late lactation cows, the dry-cow group, close-up cows and cows in early lactation.

### Heifer Program

Heifers should calve at around 22 to 24 months of age at a weight of about 1300 pounds before calving. That means they need to gain an average of 1.7 to 1.8 pounds per day. Heifers that make most of their growth before calving generally have fewer calving problems, produce better in their first lactation, and gain flesh back more rapidly.

Avoid getting calves and heifers too fat; feed them for growth. Getting heifers too fat before breeding age can impair udder development and conception rates. Fat heifers also are more sluggish at calving time triggering a higher incidence of difficult births plus all the problems associated with calving difficulties.

Pushing heifers for rapid growth on rations that are too rich in energy and improperly balanced can cause foundering at a very young age, a problem which can become real pronounced early in their first lactation.

### Late Lactation Cows

Cows should be dried off at a body score of about 3.5. This can be accomplished by regulating rations in late lactation, but give yourself ample time to get the job done. Remember, one body condition score is equivalent to about 125 pounds, or about 10% of a cow's body weight. If a cow needs to improve her flesh by 1 body score, and if you can get her to gain 2 pounds per day while she is still trying to produce milk, you'll need at least 2 months to get the job done. You may want to body score your cows about 3 weeks before dry off to get an idea of what adjustments in feeding and grouping are necessary.

Late lactation is also a good time to culture and treat cows to determine types of infections and to reduce udder infections before dry-off time. Both of these practices can help make a dry treatment program more effective.

### The Dry Group

These cows should be grouped separately so they can be properly managed. You may also want to include heifers in this group so they can receive similar care.

Give cows an adequate dry period so they have time to repair and rebuild udder tissue. This requires about 60 days for heifers and high producing cows, and 50-55 days for other cows.

Dry treat all quarters of all cows.

Aim to dry cows off at a uniform body score of about 3.5. Remember, a group of dry cows with

similar body scores is much easier to manage properly, than a group of cows that vary in flesh condition. Maintain this level of flesh up to calving time. Don't try to take weight off fat cows during the dry period; it forces them to dip into their body's reserve supply of nutrients, which is the last thing we want to do as we approach the stressful times of calving and early lactation.

Feed dry cows a specially-prepared dry-cow ration. They need it! Their needs are quite different from those of lactating cows. Some things to focus on are vitamin and mineral levels. In addition to selenium, vitamin E, calcium and phosphorus, also be concerned about potassium and magnesium. Many of our feeds, grown on well-manured and well-fertilized fields are high in potassium levels. Because of this, you may want to purchase grass hay grown under different conditions, or consider feeding, and anionic mineral mix to cows in the close-up group. Many of the fresh cow problems dairymen observe could be related to high levels of potash in feeds grown on heavily manured and heavily fields. It's something to discuss with your nutritionist.

Feed dry cows bulky, long-stemmed forages that stimulate good rumen function, and the development of a more capacious rumen. This will help to heal the gut lining and encourage greater dry matter intakes soon after calving. The dry period is also a good time to let cows get off concrete and let them get more exercise. It's also a good time to trim feet and to boost cows' immune status. Vaccination programs can vary, and you may want to consult your veterinarian for advice.

### Close-Up Cows And Springtime Heifers

About 3 weeks before calving, start increasing grain feeding rates gradually to a maximum of about 0.7% of body weight (about 8 lbs. for larger breeds). This encourages the growth and development of papillae on the gut wall. The greater the papillae development the more nutrients a cow can absorb, which is very crucial at calving time and in early lactation. The gut needs to be ready to absorb nutrients efficiently at calving time, not at 2-3 weeks after calving.

**KEEP COWS ON FEED!** This is so important! One day off feed, either before or after calving, can cause cows to mobilize a lot of body fat rapidly, which can result in fatty livers. Cows with fatty livers are more apt to become ketotic, go off feed, get twisted stomachs, and they are more susceptible to infections because of a suppressed immune system. As feed intakes drop, think of ways you can increase the nutrient density of the ration. This might be accomplished by top dressing the dry-cow ration with special supplements, by feeding them a few

pounds of the high-group TMR or concentrate mix, etc. Again, this is something to discuss with your nutritionist.

Remember all those "dumb" heifers that don't adapt to stalls, herdsmates, and work routines after calving? Besides being a real nuisance, these heifers also are more apt to have more hock and leg ailments. The dry period is a good time to help them adjust to their milking herdsmates, to dairy workers, to changes in the feeding program, to concrete, to new facilities and surroundings, etc. Get them acclimated before calving, so they don't have to make them at a time when we expect them to maximize feed intake and milk production. Remember, one way to reduce cows feed intake and dry them off is to change their feed, put them in a new stall or in a pen with a different group of cows, change their daily routine, etc. Are we doing these same things to heifers when we bring them into the milking string for their first lactation?

Provide cows and heifers with a clean, dry, sanitary maternity area, so they have a better chance of starting their lactation free from the additional stress of udder and uterine infections. Cows with infections don't feel well, don't eat well, and consequently do not get off to as good a start. Observe cows closely, and act fast to prevent little problems from turning into larger, costlier problems.

### Early Lactation

After calving, the big challenge again is to **KEEP COWS ON FEED**, doing whatever it takes to stimulate their appetites. Consider feeding some buffers, niacin, yeast, etc. Keep feeds fresh and palatable. Feed frequently or push feeds up frequently. Keep bunks and waterers clean and provide at least 2 feet of bunk space per cow.

Creating a separate group for first-calf heifers can be very beneficial, not because they need a different ration, but because of their inability to adjust socially.

Weigh the amount of feeds fed and the amount refused to accurately determine the amount actually consumed. Equally important, test moisture content of feeds regularly. Then reformulate the ration and adjust feeding rates accordingly.

As soon as cows are on feed, start increasing grain feeding rates gradually, being sure to observe intakes and being careful not to throw cows off feed.

As you feed more grain, and perhaps some fat too, be sure cows are consuming their forages and getting a sufficient amount of effective fiber to maintain good cud chewing activity, good saliva production, good rumen function and good rumen health. At least 40-45% of the total dry matter intake should come from forage — more if grain is fed separate from forages, if feeding finely-chopped forages, or if silages are high in moisture. Neutral detergent fiber intake from forages should be about 0.95% of body weight.

Feed early lactation cows high quality feeds. Feed no more than about 6-8 lbs. of grain at any one feeding, and try to offer cows some forage before feeding grain.

Over the years, we've been taught to feed cows according to milk production. With high producing cows it may be more appropriate to formulate rations on the basis of a certain level of milk production, but then feed cows according to their flesh condition. This means feeding cows all the feed they want to eat and then enticing them to eat a little more in order to maximize dry matter intakes, to minimize the loss of flesh and to encourage rapid recovery

of flesh. If we do this, production will automatically follow. Once cows are back to proper flesh, feeding rates can be brought back in line with production.

As you can see, a lot of things

affect a cow's lactation curve. Getting cows off to a good start requires a lot of attention to details and timely action.

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## EAYFA Sponsors Political Debate

**EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.)** — The Ephrata Area Young Farmers Association (EAYFA) is sponsoring a political debate of five candidates for the seat of state representative of the 99th District, set for 7:30 p.m., April 5, at the Foxchase Golf Club, in Stevens.


According to a news release, five candidates — four registered Republican and one Democrat — are seeking the seat that is being vacated by incumbent Rep. Terry Scheetz, who announced he will

not seek reelection.

The debate is to be held in the Palmer Room of the golf club, and is open to the public at not cost.

The candidates scheduled to debate include R.H. Bob Brenne-man, R-Brownstown; A. Anthony Kilkuskie, R-Ephrata; James Riss-er, R-Ephrata; Leroy Zimmerman, R-East Earl; L. Quintin Eiseman, D-Ephrata.

For more information, call Karen Becker at (717) 859-3276.



# MILK CHECK

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### Eleven Year High

If you're looking for something to cheer you up during a record snow-fall, here it is — the Minnesota-Wisconsin Price Series hit an 11-year high of \$12.41 for February.

That wasn't any better than last month but it was \$1.67 better than last year.

This may very well mean that, for the next three or four months, the trend will be higher rather than lower, as expected for this time of the year.

It appears that milk production has peaked in the Southeast, is still going up in the West, and is lower in the Midwest and Northeast. This means a continuing trend of what we have seen the last seven months and one that may not change until we grow new forage particularly in the north central states.

Winter weather is still taking its toll on milk production, but feed supply and quality may be even more limiting.

### Product Price

Lower milk production, or the threat of continued lower production, is moving up dairy product prices counter-seasonally.

Cheese prices had the largest weekly increase last Friday, since September.

In the last four weeks, block prices are up nearly 3 cents and barrels are up nearly 4 cents.

And it isn't only cheese. Butter prices that haven't seen an increase in months were up 3 cents. Powder markets are "steady to firm" with small but steady increases.

### History Lesson

So, what's so great about an 11-year high in the M-W price? Isn't everything priced higher than it was 11 years ago? But milk pricing is different than many other things including other farm products. So, how come we go back 11 years? Why not five or 15 or 20 years? That's where the history lesson starts.

It was back in 1983 that the M-W was \$12.59 in February and those with good memories, or records, will remember the early 1980's as the years of the highest support prices.

The support price then was \$12.80 but even with government help, the M-W only made \$12.59 in February.

Those were the days when dairy support prices were linked to the Index of Prices Paid and adjustments were made every six months.

That finally ended when the support price went from \$10.51 to \$12.80, so Congress stopped all further increases and President Reagan signed the bill in his hospital room after an attempted assassination.

By 1983, Commodity Credit Corporation purchases were nearly 17 billion pounds of milk equivalent, or 12 percent of total milk production.

### Government Prices Or Market Prices

A lot of changes have taken place in dairy price support legislation since then, including some attempts at voluntary supply management.

Nothing seemed to work for long and now we're at the other extreme of support prices.

In February 1983, the support price was \$12.80 and the M-W \$12.59, or 21 cents lower.

In February 1994, the support price is \$10 and the M-W is \$12.41, or \$2.41 higher.

Now CCC purchases for 1994 are estimated at five billion pounds or about three percent of total milk production.

We've come full circle from government prices to market prices. You may have ended up at the same price, but this time no one can pass a bill to take it away from you.