

dhia


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Dairyman To Dairyman

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The first thing to remember is what we are trying to accomplish during this period of the cow's life. During the preceding lactation we took a forage and grain digester and made her into a heavy forage digester for her far-off dry period. This means that during the end of the lactation period your cows are consuming the same diet but at a much lower level of intake.

Let us suppose these tail-enders are eating about 37 to 40 pounds of dry matter. The grain-to-forage ratio is at 55:45. That means that at dry off, these cows are consuming 20 to 22 pounds of grain on a dry-matter basis. Most of the time that these cows are dry we will feed them a diet that will contain 5 to 6 pounds of grain and the remaining 22 to

24 pounds of intake will be forage. Looking at dry matter, this will figure to be about 20:80 gain to forage diet.

My preference is to use this minimal amount of grain for dry cows. We need this to maintain a rumen environment that can digest increasing amounts of grain in the next lactation. This abrupt change in diet is also necessary to force good cows into their dry phase.

Now let's look at the other end of the dry period and the changes that need to take place for the high-producing dairy cows today. This simple concept is just a reversal of putting her dry. We all know that increasing energy intake anytime requires a bit more planning and patience on our part. With this in mind we can put together a steam-up, prefresh, or transition diet to add energy and other nutrients that will be necessary for our cows to stay healthy as they calve. This diet should be somewhat of an in-between step from an energy standpoint. This means that when the milk cow diet calls for energy levels of .78 meal NEI and the dry cow diet is at .65 meal NEI, we should set a target value for energy somewhere in the middle of the two. A prefresh diet that is formulated for .71 meal NEI will necessitate increasing grain levels and decreasing forage. It would be common to see the 20 percent grain portion of the diet increase to 35 percent to 40 percent during this time.

Feeding the same forages

during the prefresh period always seems like a good idea. Corn silage and haylage can be used effectively when care is taken concerning cation-anion balance. Haylage, particularly legumes, can often be very high in potassium and care needs to be taken when using these in the transition diet.

Protein levels should be a bit higher than 12 percent to 13 percent dry cow diet - 14 percent to 15 percent crude protein should do the job. I do not like protein levels to be higher than this even for the first calf heifers in the transition phase. Higher protein levels seem to induce calving difficulties because of larger-than-expected calves. As more research is done, we may be able to reduce the protein that is fed even more by meeting the needs of specific amino acids. One tool that could serve as a check when protein levels are suspected of causing difficulties is BUN. Blood urea nitrogen, like its milk counterpart MUN, can tell us about protein usage efficiency. You should check with your vet regarding such a tool.

Energy content of the close-up cow should be monitored. Large calves can also be produced when excessive levels are fed. The best choice for energy contribution in this diet should be a combination of good quality forage, appropriate grains, or by-products used in the milk cow diet. One exception should be noted: feeding fat sources are questionable during this time. Whether it is whole oil-seeds, tallow, or some by-pass type fat, these feed ingredients are usually harder to digest and may even reduce intakes. It is usually easy enough to meet the energy requirements of this group with less costly and more traditional sources such as sugars, starches, and digestible fibers. If you find this untrue, you should look at the forages you selected for this group.

The one aspect that makes feeding the transitional cow difficult that is of dry matter intakes. The natural tendency

with these cows is to reduce eating. If for no other reason, the physical restriction by the growing unborn calf can cause a major reduction of intakes. We may want to look to supplement trace vitamins and minerals as we predict DMI to decrease by as much as 20 percent during the last week or so before calving. To minimize this drop we can use molasses to enhance the flavor and appetite.

I spent time in the last three articles answering concerns about these transitional cows. I urge everyone to stop ignoring this group. This is truly one place where a little "TLC" can produce some big results.

Average Farm Feed Costs For Handy Reference

To help farmers across the state to have handy reference of commodity input costs in their feeding operations for DHIA record sheets or to develop livestock feed cost data, here's last week's average costs of various ingredients as compiled from regional reports across the state of Pennsylvania.

Remember, these are averages, so you will need to adjust your figures up or down according to your location and the quality of your crop.

Corn, No.2y — 2.39 bu., 4.27 cwt.

Wheat, No. 2 — 2.41 bu., 4.03 cwt.

Barley, No. 3 — 1.53 bu., 3.26 cwt.

Oats, No. 2 — 1.41 bu., 4.41 cwt.

Soybeans, No. 1 — 4.41 bu., 7.36 cwt.

Ear Corn — 76.23 ton, 3.81 cwt.

Alfalfa Hay — 136.25 ton, 6.81 cwt.

Mixed Hay — 129.25 ton, 6.46 cwt.

Timothy Hay — 137.50 ton, 6.88 cwt.



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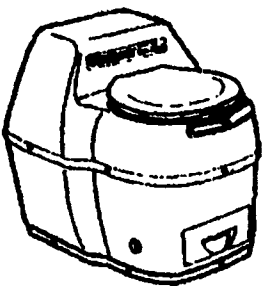
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