

dhia


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Dairyman To Dairyman

GEORGE CUDOC

PA DHIA
Consulting
Dairyman



Question: Do we need a transition group? What are some of the concerns for the prefresh period?

Transition groups address the special needs of a cow shortly before calving. Transition can be accomplished in many different ways. Traditional tie-stall barns, for example, can use any stall to create a transition group for one individual. This can be effective as long as we control the sharing of feed from the neighbors. Free stall barns usually have a separate group set aside for transition cows but this style of management is challenged by not knowing feed intakes of individual cows. We will look at some ideas that are common regardless of the way we handle these cows.

The number one concern during the time before calving is stress. Balanced diets go a long way in reducing stress. This can only be accomplished when feed is properly formulated with the assistance of your feed consultant. Beyond formulation, we need to provide adequate feed

bunk space for these cows. This is one of the most abused management considerations that I come across for transition cows. As cows approach calving, they are already thinking about not eating. This is due to both chemical and physical stimulus as calving nears. We can help reduce chemically initiated drops in feed intake by watching the cation-anion balance of the diet. Some feed additives such as niacin, yeast, and probiotics have been used successfully. On the other hand, we can do little about the physical impact that the calf has on the cow and her reflex to eat. What we can do is ensure that there is room and reachable feed when she does want to eat. Some other considerations that we should address are:

- bunk space to accommodate width of the cow (2.5 feet for heifers and 3 feet for mature Holsteins)
- limit travel distance from rest area to feed area
- eliminate headlocks (excess body condition)
- provide cleanable source of water
- maintain proper footing to avoid slipping
- maintain fresh feed (multiple feeding or pushup)
- good ventilation
- adequate lighting (will also help observation)
- avoid corners (cows like to calve while backed into a corner)
- clean and dry

I know that most of you do all of these things and that I have not said anything new. I also know that it is easy to get caught up in our milk cow facilities and forget some others. I challenge everyone to go out and evaluate the place that you provide for your cows to calve. Common sense will tell you if you are using facilities that reduce problems or those that invite them. Next week I will look at this same question and address some concerns about which animals should be in a transition group and how we should feed them.

Having the opportunity to work with dairymen on various farms has made me even more of a believer in the little things that make a difference. I guess

when you think about it, there are no little things

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 — 2.34 bu., 4.19 cwt.
 - Wheat, No. 2 — 2.37 bu., 3.95 cwt.
 - Barley, No. 3 — 1.56 bu., 3.33 cwt.
 - Oats, No. 2 — 1.50 bu., 4.67 cwt.
 - Soybeans, No. 1 — 4.29 bu., 7.17 cwt.
 - Ear Corn — 75.59 ton, 3.78 cwt.
 - Alfalfa Hay — 144.25 ton, 7.21 cwt.
 - Mixed Hay — 127.50 ton, 6.38 cwt.
 - Timothy Hay — 135.00 ton, 6.75 cwt.

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