

Does Grazing Have A Place With Larger Herds?

(Continued from Page 29)

pounds) than cows fed all pasture as the sole forage plus about 20 pounds of concentrate. Less grazing time and less pasture DM intake during the summer months and more pTMR would likely have resulted in 10 or more lb/cow/day.

Here are some possibilities for the use of grazing in larger non-grazing herds:

- Graze low producing, late lactation groups for the last one to two months of lactation. Feed costs can be reduced by using pasture during the last one to two months of lactation. Good quality pasture with grazing for ½ day plus feeding a pTMR will likely not result in a loss of production compared to confinement feeding. For planning purposes, about ⅓ acre/cow should be adequate for ½ day grazing. Getting cows off concrete should have substantial benefits to cow and foot health.

- For dry cows, a well-designed and well-managed pasture system can supply much of the forage, particularly for the early dry group. About 10 to 12 pounds of pasture DM can provide about ½ of the forage with a pTMR providing the remainder of the nutrients. With the pre-fresh/day group, we will likely want more control of the nutrient intake with less nutrients from pasture. The exercise and the improved feet and leg health will be a major advantage to grazing. Recent

research at Michigan State indicates that exercise of dry cows may improve animal health and welfare based on extensive physiological measurements. A grazing area provides that opportunity.

- For heifers, some studies have reported about \$200 lower costs per heifer with a well planned and managed grazing system. In addition, getting heifers off concrete for six to eight months of the year will likely contribute to less feet and leg problems and longer herd life.

Summary

Well-managed intensive grazing systems offer a management alternative to be competitive in the future dairy industry.

The increasing cost of family living and decreasing profit margins will necessitate that graziers be even better managers of cows and pasture in the future and that herd size will likely need to increase. With improved grazing management, many can increase herd size from the same land base.

In addition, grazing systems are perceived to be more sustainable and beneficial to the welfare of the animal compared to nongrazing operations. Also, costs of manure handling and bedding will be reduced during the grazing season.

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