

Large-Volume Drenching: A Common Practice For Cows

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DENVER (Lancaster Co.) — Dr. Steve Foulke of the Agricultural Veterinary Association here practices large-volume drenching on dairy cows almost daily.

Foulke said he has been administering the nutrient- and bacteria-rich drenches ever since he started as a vet 11 years ago, but advances in the last two or three years have made the job easier and more common.

A large-volume drench for a dairy cow usually consists of a five- to seven-gallon slurry, including alfalfa meal, vitamins, minerals, and rumen bacteria. It is administered to a stressed and/or dehydrated cow by means of a pump attached to a tube that is inserted through the mouth and down the esophagus to the rumen.

"Basically, it gives (the cow) an instant meal," Foulke said.

Positive health effects include rehydration and the rapid introduction of nutrients and essential bacteria.

Another benefit is that the sheer volume of fluid creates a "mild distension of the rumen that causes it to start contracting like it should," Foulke said.

The recent availability of drench mixes has made the job of drenching a lot easier.

Prior to prepackaged drench mixes, vets had to mix their own drenching concoctions. Part of that task included drawing rumen juice from a healthy cow to provide bacteria for the drench.

Drench mixes now on the market include the necessary rumen bacteria cultures as well as an array of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals.

Foulke encourages herd managers to learn drenching procedures themselves. "We train a lot of farmers to do this," he said.

For managers of larger herds of about 200 cows or more, he recommends purchasing their own drenching equipment.

"It pays for itself" in a short period of time, he said.

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