Attention to Feeding Programs for Dry Cows Pays Dividends

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Poor dry cow programs can decrease milk production by 1000-1500 lbs during the next lactation. This loss corresponds to $130-195 of lost potential income per cow. Dry cows are one of the most important groups of cattle on a dairy farm which are often put out on pasture and forgotten.

Important Steps in Implementing a Sound Dry Cow Feeding and Management Program:

- Separate dry cows from the milking herd because their nutrient needs are different than milking cows. Dry cows need 50% less protein than a milking cow and about half as much calcium.
- Provide dry cows with shade and plenty of cool, CLEAN water.
- Monitor the body condition of dry cows. Dry cows should be in good condition when dried off and should not lose weight during the dry period.
- Monitor condition of pastures. During late summer, the amount and quality of cool season grasses decrease. Consider feeding dry cows some good quality hay or a limited amount of corn silage.
- Infected-fescue pasture or hay decreases feed intake more than other forages during hot weather. As a result, dry cows may lose the body condition farmers have worked hard to get on their cows. Also, cows fed dirty fescue may not come into milk after they calve.
- Dry cows need to consume adequate amounts of minerals and vitamins. Besides the macrominerals, dry cows need to be supplemented with the appropriate amounts of copper, zinc, selenium, and vitamin E to name just a few. These minerals help improve the cow's immune system and improve reproductive efficiency. These effects are seen with a decrease in retained placentas and mastitis.
- Rations for dry cows need to be balanced to determine the amount of grain which should be fed to complement the forages being fed and to supply nutrients needed.

Implementing a sound dry cow program is very important for a profitable early lactation this next lactation.