

Review Your Management Practices for Your Fresh and Dry Dairy Cows

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Both your dry and fresh cows represent your future money makers and you need to be managed them as such!!! Contrary to popular belief, a cow's next lactation starts not ends at the dry period. Sound feeding and management practices for both of these groups of cows directly impact your profitability through improvements in cow health, milk production, and reproductive performance this lactation. Taking a few minutes to evaluate and then implement changes in your management practices can help improve your profitability. Please take a few minutes to review the management practices outlined below.

1. Reduce stress by preventing overcrowding at the feed bunk, water trough, and resting space. Several dairy scientists now are recommending stocking rates at 80% of capacity to prevent overcrowding both BEFORE and AFTER calving. When overcrowding occurs, the dominant cow out competes first-calf heifers, fresh cows and more submissive cows thus ensuring these more timid cows do not rest and/or eat at optimum levels.
2. Get cows to eat. All fresh cows are in a negative energy balance. The degree of this negative energy balance is the key. Studies have shown that cows with the lowest energy balance before and within the first 15 days after calving have delayed ovulations. Some cows are just "better eaters" than others. Selection on milk production and health will probably see these "poorer eaters" culled from the herd sooner.
3. Provide a well balanced diet that has been formulated to prevent dry cows from getting too fat or from losing weight, and one which provides the proper mineral balance to prevent subclinical (no outward signs of the disease) milk fever. Cows with subclinical milk fever have been shown to have a higher incidence of displaced abomasums (DA- or twisted stomachs), retained placentas, or decreased immunity to diseases. Work with your nutritionist to make sure your pre-fresh and fresh cows are getting the proper nutrition they need to prevent various metabolic diseases, such as milk fever and ketosis.
4. Provide a clean, comfortable environment prior to calving. Cows tend to stand more before calving thus the flooring or surface has a direct impact on hoof health after calving. Clean bedding surfaces are important to improve overall udder health and help decrease the chances of environmental mastitis. This time of year, minimizing mud through the use of filter fabric under feeding pads can be very beneficial. A cow's immune system or ability to fight off diseases, i.e. mastitis, is the lowest 2 weeks before and after calving.

5. Groove concrete or add rubber mats to improve footing in alley ways, return lanes from parlors, and other travel lanes.
6. Design ways to decrease heat stress on cows before calving when temperatures rise above 70 to 75 F. Heat stress has been shown to decrease the quality of colostrum, birth weight of calves, and milk production and increase the incidence of retained placentas, displaced abomasums and hoof problems in early lactation. By providing shade over the feed and resting areas, preventing overcrowding, and running fans and sprinklers, the amount of heat stress can be reduced. Reducing heat stress on close-up dry cows is very important, definitely will pay financial rewards, and is often times overlooked
7. Do not vaccinate cows within 10 days before or after calving. A cow's immunity is at the lowest during this time frame. Vaccines are better used outside this time frame.
8. Do not house sick cows in the areas used to house fresh cows. The immunity of fresh cows is at the lowest and we do not want to expose them to diseases more than necessary.