

Summertime Dry Cow Management

By: Donna Amaral-Phillips, Ph.D.

COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION
SERVICE



1. The heat and humidity of the summer places challenges on managing dry cows. First and foremost, we need to remember that your management practices for dry cows or lack thereof, directly impacts how well they milk after calving. Take a few minutes to review your dry cow program often over the next few months to make sure you are not leaving behind potential income this fall when these cows freshen.
2. Shade is very important for all dry cows to reduce heat stress. Close-up dry cows (cows within 3 weeks of calving) especially need adequate shade. Rotation of shade trees helps decrease the chances of mastitis especially in cows within a couple of weeks of freshening. Do not allow cows access to ponds to prevent future mastitis infections.
3. Feed troughs located in the sun are not used during the heat of the day and will limit feed intake especially for the close-up dry cow group.
4. If you use pasture for your dry cows, make sure they have adequate pasture to eat. Cool season grasses, such as fescue, bluegrass, and orchardgrass, do not grow much in the heat of the summer. When forage availability becomes limiting, hay or other stored forages need to be fed or the cows need to be moved to a crop that is growing.
5. Water consumption increases dramatically with increases in temperature and humidity. Water intake also governs how much feed, even a dry cow, eats. Cows and heifers drink less water when the water's temperature is above 80 degrees F. Thus, shading waterers or using insulated waterers is important to maintain water intake and thus feed intake.
6. Do not allow dry cows to lose weight or body condition. Proper amounts of body condition (body condition scores of 3.0 - 3.25) are important for these cows to milk well and rebred quickly after they calve. Take a few minutes to routinely review your dry cow management program. Remember that the dry period is the start of the next lactation not a time to just "put them out on the back forty". You do not want to leave behind any potential income.