

Want to Improve Your Income by \$450 More per Cow



By Donna M. Amaral-Phillips

Want to improve your cow's production this next lactation and potentially make \$450 more per cow? Sound dry cow management practices can accomplish this objective by improving production by 2000 to 4000 pounds of milk this next lactation. Sound feeding and management practices during this time frame can improve performance this next lactation by getting cows to (1) milk better during early lactation, (2) rebreed earlier, and (3) have a better immune system to fight off mastitis infections. We need to think of the dry period as the start of a cow's next lactation. Thus, take a few minutes to review your feeding and management program for your dry cows. It will pay dividends by helping improve your dairy business.

- 1. Feed the correct amount of grain to dry cows.** The amount fed and the protein content of a grain mix is determined by the quality and type of forage being fed. As the quality of forage decreases, more grain and a higher protein content grain mix is needed to supply the nutrients needed by the dry cow. If a cow does not receive adequate amount of energy, they lose body condition or weight. In early lactation, cows cannot eat enough so they rely on these body stores to provide some of the needed energy so they can produce milk. These lost body stores potentially could decrease milk production this next lactation. **Bottom line:** Test forages, use these results to balance rations, and then feed the amount of grain needed to complement the forages being fed.
- 2. Provide unlimited access to water.** Water intake governs feed intake. As water intake is compromised, feed intake decreases which may result in cows losing weight (body condition). Again, cows will not peak as well and will not milk as well this next lactation. During the winter, waterers freeze and adequate water intake can become an issue. **Bottom Line:** Routinely check waterers and ponds to make sure cattle have unlimited access to drinking water.
- 3. Provide adequate minerals and vitamins** in the grain mix for all dry cows. Proper mineral and vitamin nutrition is important in the prevention of retained placentas (i.e. selenium) and improving a cow's immunity after calving to decrease the severity of mastitis and see that administered vaccines are beneficial. In addition,

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the fetus inside the cow stores some minerals (i.e. copper and selenium) in its body for use after birth. **Bottom Line:** Talk to your nutritionist or local extension agent to make sure you are providing adequate amounts of minerals and vitamins to your dry cows and cows close to calving.

4. **Feed cows a special diet just before calving** so they can do well after calving. Feeding programs three weeks before the expected calving date are designed to start transition back into the milking herd. These diets also can help minimize fresh cow problems, such as milk fever, which can decrease milk production this next lactation. These feeding and management programs are designed to use forages with a lower potassium content such as corn silage (if fed to the milking herd) and 8-10 lbs (Holstein cows) of a specially formulated grain mix. Various feed additives can be effectively used during this time frame since these cows are under more stress associated with calving and the changes in feeding and management. **Bottom Line:** Design a feeding and management program for pre-fresh cows (close-up dry cow program) which minimizes health problems around calving time. These programs are not the same as placing cows in milking string before calving.
5. **Evaluate feeding and housing situation for dry cows** especially three weeks before calving. Pre-fresh cows need plenty of bunk and freestall space. By achieving these goals, environmental- related stresses are reduced, intake can be optimized, and the health of the cow can be maintained. **Bottom Line:** Provide 30 to 36 inches of bunk space per pre-fresh cow and plenty of space for all cows to rest comfortably on a clean, well bedded surface. Additional attention needs to be paid to provide adequate bunk and resting space when large numbers of cows and heifers are due to calve.