

Ways to Meet Newly Imposed or Potential Milk Quotas

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For those of you who routinely read my articles, they usually discuss ways to improve profitability for your dairy businesses. Tactics to achieve this goal usually involve improving milk production per cow, milk components, or health of different groups of cattle. However, with the current over supply of milk associated with the closure of restaurants and other food outlets, reductions in amount of milk shipped may be requested by processors/milk cooperatives. If requested, these reductions in milk production need to occur without compromising the long-term health or performance of cows and their replacements. Writing this is very painful, since it goes against the foundation we have built for feeding and managing dairy herds and I know the result greatly impacts on-farm cash flow even more than has already occurred. Many popular press articles have touched upon strategies to reduce milk volume; each having their limitations or pitfalls. I hope that you will never need to consider these options, but in today's business climate, starting to think through different scenarios may be prudent. Changes are occurring rapidly and those businesses who can adapt quicker are better able to survive these uncharted times.



1. Identify the most profitable cows in your herd. What defines a profitable cow in your herd? Is she that cow with above average milk production, rebreeds without much delay, and/or has a low SCC? To identify these profitable cows and on the flip side of that coin- the least profitable cows, one must review production and management records. By reviewing reports generated through DHI testing or computer software programs, decisions can be based on data not opinions. If you do not have recent individual SCC, a CMT test could be used to identify high or low SCC cows.
2. Develop a priority list for those cows that are the least profitable, essentially a cull list but in a priority order. More than likely these cows will have one or more strikes against them, like high SCC, numerous cases of clinical mastitis, or will have long lactations because of breeding issues. Some of these cows may need to enter their second career as beef cattle sooner than later when cull cow prices are reasonable and markets and harvest facilities are open.
3. Cull cows sooner than normal. If your facilities are over-crowded, reducing the numbers of cows per pen/group may not gain you as much reduction in production, if production of those cows left in the group increases.
4. Dry cows off early, place them in a separate group from normal dry cows, and feed them a maintenance diet so they do not get fat. A ration needs to be created especially for them so they get enough, but not too much energy and protein. This diet still needs to contain the proper amounts of mineral and vitamins. Feed costs will be reduced, but not eliminated.

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5. Switch from 3X to 2X milking frequency. Generally, we expect a 6 to 9 lb increase in milk production when switching from 2X to 3X. You might want to consider milking the fresher/early lactation group 3X and those in later lactation 2X.
6. Feed calves whole milk in place of milk replacer, and perhaps wean calves at a later age. Whole milk from a Holstein contains about the same concentration of protein as an accelerated milk replacer. Thus, the reason “old timers” often made the statement that calves did better on whole milk versus the 20:20 milk replacers. Whole milk should be fed within an hour of harvest to reduce bacterial loads and preferably pasteurized.
7. One strategy that has been discussed is decreasing the nutrient density across the herd to support a lower amount of milk production. One problem with this approach is that early lactation cows are geared toward producing milk at the expense of their body reserves. Essentially, they are going to take care of the meeting the needs for the current lactation before they get pregnant. Thus, getting cows to rebreed can become more difficult and could compound cash flow in the future as milk production will likely be lower in the longer lactation cows and they may get overconditioned.

None of these possible strategies are the best and definitely do not help improve cash flow, but may be necessary in these uncharted times.

