

DAIRY PIPELINE

Department of Dairy Science

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LOOKING FOR A “GOOD BUY” ON FEEDS?

Increases in the price of corn and soybean meal have changed how we view feeding the dairy herd. High prices are likely to continue for the foreseeable future which increases the value of sound economic decisions regarding feeding programs for the dairy herd.

However, price is only one part of the decision. The following factors need to be considered before purchasing a commodity.

► How long will the product retain its value in storage? Substantial storage losses add to the cost of a feed. For instance, if wet brewer grains cost \$55/ton, but 20% is lost to spoilage, the true cost is really \$66/ton.

► What is the variability in dry matter and nutrient content? Wetter feeds are worth less/ton and their price should reflect this. If trailer loads of commodities are being considered, purchase them with a guaranteed minimum protein and energy content on a dry matter basis. Analyze all loads of commodities delivered to the dairy, with the exception of whole cottonseed which is difficult to sample and analyze.

► How palatable is the feed? If it reduces intake and consequently milk production, it might not be worth it.

► Is the supply dependable? Wet brewers grains is an example of a feed which has seasonal supply fluctuations. There's more available during the summer beer drinking season and less during cooler months. Long time users of the product rarely experience supply interruptions. However, failure to receive the product when promised causes changes in the ration and drops in milk production.

► How is the commodity handled? Will it flow through gravity flow bins or does it require a commodity shed? Can it be stored in bags?

Alternatives to corn and soybean meal involve more than evaluating cost/ton. Perform some fundamental price comparisons and then consider the more practical considerations discussed above.

—Bob James,
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CONSIDER TRYING A NEW DHI REPORT THIS SUMMER

DHI records can become a little too familiar. DHI members may quickly check a few choice numbers and set the reports aside. The habits of quickly reviewing familiar formats also make it easy to miss important information. I would like to challenge DHI members to do something really radical this summer: subscribe to a new DHI report for one month and resolve to study the thing until you understand what it tells you. If you like it, keep taking it. If you don't like it, try another, or at least know that you gave a new report an honest try. DRMS Raleigh has expanded service to some new areas of the country recently, including Minnesota and parts of the west coast. Producers in those areas ask for some of their familiar reports to be preserved, a request that was honored in the tradition of service that makes DRMS a really good processing center. There are some really good features of these reports, and they are certainly new to Virginia produc-

ers. Consider one of reports below – a selection from an even dozen I saw at the recent DRMS Spring Workshop.

► DHI-360 Reproduction report: this list pulls together reproductive facts on individual cows in an easy to read format.

Cost - 1¢/cow/month

► DHI-217 Herd Progress Report: this list compares key herd performance data for up to two years in a single report. It makes it easy to spot trends in production, reproduction, days in milk and so forth.

Cost - \$2/herd/month

► DHI-231 Persistency Analysis: this report groups cows by month of calving and lactation number, and tracks performance through the months of lactation. It's a different way to look at test day milk weights – different from any report I have seen in the past. Cost - \$3/herd/month

► DHI-219 Basic Herd Summary: this report extracts production data from the DHI 202

Photo courtesy of Flickr.com

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Upcoming Activities

June 7: 4-H Youth Dairy Heifer Show, 12 noon at Franklin Rec Park

Dairy Cow Nutrition College:

Monday, June 16: 6:30 pm
Vet School, Blacksburg, VA

Tuesday, June 17: 6:30 pm
Rural Retreat

Thursday, June 19:
11:30 am—Independence
6:30 pm—Abingdon

RSVP for Nutrition College meetings to Chase Scott, 276-223-6040

If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.

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for the last eleven test dates as well as ME lactation records and reproductive summaries by lactation for the current test. It is straightforward information in a simple format. Cost - 1 ¢/cow/month.

► **DHI-365 Condensed Herd Summary:** this one includes selected data from the DHI 202 plus basic information on individual cows from the DHI 210. This report may appeal to consultants who want herd summary data as well as specifics about cows, but with less detail than other reports. I like

the brevity and the format.

Cost - \$2/herd/month plus 1¢/cow/month

I have no intention of suggesting you can't make it in the dairy business without these reports. However, you might like them, and you will be more familiar with your DHI records if you give one or more of these reports a try for even one month.

—Bennet Cassell

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DON'T OVERLOOK THE DRY COWS THIS SUMMER

Summer is fast approaching, bringing with it the promise of hot days. Benefits of cooling lactating cows are hard to deny with the plethora of data documenting increases in milk production and reproductive efficiency with the use of heat abatement systems. But what effect is the heat having on dry cows? These girls are exposed to the same stressful situations—often with shade trees as their only cooling provision.

What long term effects result from heat-stressed dry cows? Heat stress in dry cows results in lower calf birth weights; reduced feed intake and magnified negative energy balance; suppressed immune function; and lower postpartum milk production. Lower calf birth weights are shown to be correlated with reduced early lactation production. Additionally, calf survival can be compromised with lower birth weights and poor colostrum quality from cows with suppressed immune systems. Mixed results have been observed for reproduction, with some studies finding reduced conception rates for summer calving cows while others found no difference. A 1999 study in Texas observed 21% conception rates for summer calving cows versus 36% for fall calving cows. A recent study from a commercial herd in California found increases in milk production of three pounds per cow per day with use of fans, sprinklers, and shade in the dry period versus sprinklers only. This three pound increase netted an additional \$2,100 for this farm annually.

Cooling systems for lactating cows should be the first priority, followed by heat abatement for dry cows. Early lactation production and health sets the stage for the entire lactation. Cooling for dry cows is worth considering if it can help these cows get off to a good

start in lactation. The logical area to target is the dry cow feed bunk. Reduced heat stress in this area will encourage cows to eat more. Dry cows are prone to reduced dry matter intake in the week prior to calving regardless of season, leading to increased negative energy balance and immunosuppression. Increasing intakes ensures adequate energy for fetal development, enhances immune function, and prevents many metabolic problems. At a minimum shade clothes over the bunk should be considered. Ideally fans and sprinklers should be incorporated as well, with fans every 24 - 30 feet. However, this requires electricity at the bunk and the ability to handle runoff from sprinklers. Sprinklers would not be prudent with a drylot feeding area. The added stress of negotiating through the mud created would expend more energy and discourage intakes, defeating the purpose for cooling in the first place. Carefully evaluate your dry cow lot for cooling options. Your local Dairy Extension Agent can provide recommendations for your individual situation. Remember, cows experience heat stress when the temperature-humidity index exceeds 75°F. Temperatures have already exceeded this threshold, so NOW is the time to get these systems in place.

—Beverly Cox,

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For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at VT Dairy—Home of the Dairy Extension Program on the web at: www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu.

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