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Taking service to another level!

Winter... and Dairy Heifers!

There are numerous known advantages to having dairy heifers calve at 24 months of age. In order to achieve this goal, there are several important aspects to keep in mind: nutrition, environment and management. With the onset of winter come colder temperatures, wind, rain, snow and mud ~ all of which can have a detrimental impact on reaching the desired goal. Let's consider the importance of each part of this equation:

- **Nutrition** – Nutritional recommendations are based on certain assumptions: replacement heifers are clean and dry, fed ad lib, free of disease and parasites, unbred, and raised at moderate temperatures. Heifers have a base energy requirement and dietary energy density level in order to maintain targeted growth and development. This is calculated at a thermo-neutral temperature of 20°C. As cold winter weather sets in, these energy-related requirements increase. If bodily requirements are not met, the heifer will begin to suffer the effects of cold stress, which is most typically seen as a decrease in daily weight gain. Rations fed to dairy heifers throughout winter months need to reflect this need for additional energy. Furthermore, sufficient feed and forage must be provided to meet a naturally-occurring increase in dry matter intake.
- **Environment** – While we cannot regulate climatic conditions, it is possible to provide an environment that will reduce the impact of cold stress on dairy heifers. Exposure to wind increases heat loss and increases the potential for cold stress, as does exposure to snow, rain, mud and manure. Heifers maintained in clean, dry quarters, and out of direct exposure to wind and the elements can withstand relatively cold temperatures. Good ventilation is, however, necessary. Heifers that are weighted down with mud and manure will not be able to sustain maintenance requirements, let alone achieve optimum growth. While a ration may provide ideal levels of energy, housing and environmental conditions must also be carefully considered, with appropriate changes and adjustments implemented. Together, these factors will help to influence the growth and development of quality replacement dairy heifers that calve at or before 24 months of age.
- **Management** – Properly managing your heifers is critical to the future of your lactating herd. The impact of winter weather, along with proactive attention to nutrition and environmental conditions can make a difference in how these heifers will perform in the future. Be sure to consider such management aspects as available bunk space, overcrowding, age/size of heifers and how they are grouped, the availability of clean water, bedding, a good vaccination program and

many more factors. Paying attention to these things will help you raise healthy, productive heifers and impact your future herd.

(Edited from an article by Patrick Hoffman, University of WI-Madison)

WINTER IS A BUSY TIME ON THE FARM...

Farming is a year-round full-time job! You work as hard in the winter as in any season of the year, with a never-ending list of things to do, fix, and buy. Equipment needs to be maintained with repairs or replacements. Hours are spent reading the latest research reports on the best varieties of corn, soybeans, small grains and grasses; needing to set short-range and long-range goals; placing seed orders to maximize available discounts – and the myriad of other day-to-day chores that need attention! Winter is the time of year when you make the important decisions about what to plant, when and where to plant, while reviewing last year's financial and operational records to strategize the next growing season and calculating how much capital will be needed to start the new growing season.

But, in winter these jobs are only made harder. Everything takes longer. In cold weather, the water freezes and power outages occur. The animals still have to be watered and fed several times a day, and the milking routine must continue at least twice each day. Ice storms and blizzards compound the challenges, and increasing the chance of cold or slipping-related injury, as well as other possible health issues. Each and every day the chores must be done and the routine continues 24-7 with little change!

Keeping the farm going is indeed a huge task that requires a great deal of commitment, regardless of the weather. From the heat of summer – to the cold of winter there is always something that needs to be done. Establishing a priority list can be helpful, but we also need to prepare for those unforeseen and inevitable situations that can complicate our efforts and eat up our time.

Yes, it is winter! And – no, most producers are not basking on some distant, sunny shore waiting for spring. They're working on the farm as usual. And I, for one, am glad they do. Dairy and livestock producers make up less than 2% of our population, feeding the rest of us with efficiency, quality and care that no other nation can match.

We thank you! (Edited from an article by Carl Davis, U of Delaware)

**ARE YOU PREPARED FOR WINTER?
DETERMINE FORAGE & FEED INVENTORIES
CHECK & WINTERIZE ALL EQUIPMENT**

Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or want to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Call us! Our goal is to help you.
That's the W-S Feed commitment!

**VOLUME 4 – Number 12 – December 2014
W-S FEED... the team for Results!**

Merry Christmas!

Wishing you & yours the best this Christmas & throughout the coming New Year!

Thank you for your business and support in 2014. It is our pleasure to work with you... and to be a part of your team!

Merry Christmas!

WINTER LIGHTING & YOUR COWS...

As winter sets in, we experience not only cold, damp weather, but also a reduced level of daylight. Studies show the impact that reduced daylight may have on people, with many suffering from what is called SAD (Season Affective Disorder). What about your cows? Are they impacted by reduced daylight during winter?

There have been numerous studies on this subject, with the consensus that lactating dairy cows show a definite negative impact by a reduction in daylight ~ and conversely perform better under systems offering long-day lighting (LDL). Both increased milk production and improved heifer development are among the benefits noted with this practice. It is recommended that a minimum of 15-20 footcandles of light be used in areas where dairy cows spend most of their time. This goes hand-in-hand with a need for extended lighting over a 16 to 18 hour light-period and a 6-8 hour dark-period each day. One research study by the UW Profitability Project showed that providing supplemental lighting (LDL) during fall and winter months can increase milk production between 5-to-16%. This increase in production is during a period that would typically show lower overall productivity. The increase in production would not only pay for the additional electricity, but may provide additional profitability.

In addition to aiding your cows, LDL will contribute to the general safety of working in this environment, helping to reduce the incidents of slipping and other accidents while performing winter chores in the barn. It also makes it easier to monitor cows in heat, health problems, cow off feed, and much more. Consider the impact of LDL in your facility. Light up your barn for the possibility of improved results!



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Wishing Your & Yours

CHECK IT OUT!