



DAIRYINFO

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Tips for Controlling Heifer Feed Costs

Feed costs comprise 55 to 60 percent of the total cost of rearing dairy replacement heifers, so keeping a sharp eye on feed expenses can have a tremendous impact on enterprise profitability. Pat Hoffman, dairy scientist and heifer management specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, says managing feed costs need not mean sacrificing heifer quality. To achieve both, he recommends:

- **Understand heifer nutritional requirements –** The nutritional requirements of heifers are much different than those of lactating cows. Use published guidelines specifically for heifers when formulating rations, and work with a knowledgeable dairy nutritionist.
- **Adjust ration to changing environment –** Energy adjustments based on environmental conditions are important for heifers, because they often are reared in conditions outside of thermal neutrality. This is especially true for younger heifers (<300 pounds).
- **Avoid over-conditioning –** Too much energy in the ration adds up to unnecessary expense plus over-conditioned heifers. Those animals are more prone to calving difficulties and metabolic diseases at freshening.
- **Produce high tonnage forages –** High-tonnage crops such as corn silage usually are the lowest-cost forages to produce. This high-energy forage source can be tailored to heifer rations by altering agronomic practices to increase tonnage and decrease energy content. Many low-energy forage sources work well in heifer rations.
- **Feed protein wisely –** Younger heifers need more protein, but levels should be adjusted down as heifers age to avoid unnecessary feed costs. Excessive protein does not enhance stature growth.
- **Feed precise amounts of minerals & vitamins –** Minerals and vitamins often are over-fed in an effort to ensure adequate levels. Save on unnecessary costs and feed heifers precisely by testing feedstuffs and then supplementing accordingly.
- **Don't waste feed –** Do not feed heifers off the ground, and do not provide unlimited feed. A simple bunk scoring system has great utility in precisely feeding heifers. In general, heifers should be fed to near-empty bunk scores.
- **Consider ionophores –** Studies have demonstrated that these supplements improve feed efficiency in heifers. To capture maximum benefit, diets may have to be slightly limit-fed. True ionophores also control coccidiosis.

- **Consider genomics –** Genomic testing can be done on dairy calves, with results available by the time a heifer is four months of age. Consider culling dairy heifers with poor genetics at a very young age to reduce the number of heifers reared. This strategy is most effective when a dairy has an excess supply of heifers.

(Edited from an article by Patrick Hoffman, UW-Madison Extension; as presented by Dairy Herd Network, March, 2012)



Ready for Summer Heat?

It's time to plan ahead for those hot and humid days of summer. Cows prefer a cooler, more moderate temperature and humidity than we have in most areas throughout the late spring and summer months. Their ultimate comfort has a direct correlation on how well they eat and produce, along with your profitability. The potential impact of heat, humidity and the stress this can cause on your cows can be countered in many ways, including such things as water, airflow and nutrition. I'd be happy to talk with you about heat stress – and to work with you all summer, keeping your cows "happy" and performing year-round! Don't wait until the first "hot day" arrives. Unfortunately, that will be too late!

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NEED PRESERVATIVE? CALL ME!

*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 our commitment!*

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Making Hay?

The first cutting of hay will be here before we know it! When and how you cut grasses and/or alfalfa is critical to the nutrient value of hay, along with ensuring it is dried properly prior to baling. In addition to management-related considerations, it is important to treat hay for maximum preservation and nutritional quality at feed out. Treating your hay with a quality, research-tested preservative during baling can help reduce spoilage and mold growth, while maintaining nutritional quality. **HAY SOLUTION** is excellent for use with dried hay when baling! It can help to optimize hay production and ultimately quality. It is equally important to treat haylage with a quality preservative or inoculant. Haylage often contains undesirably high or low levels of moisture, which can result in less than ideal fermentation and lead to decreased intake and/or animal performance. Get the facts! Invest in your hay/haylage this spring and summer!

Quality Inputs?

The digestive system of a cow is a remarkable thing. Cows consume forages and feeds that help maintain a population of rumen 'bugs'. In turn, these 'bugs' aid in the breakdown and utilization of ingredients, and also contribute to the nutrient value of the ration when they die and are digested by the cow. This entire process (rumination) serves to maintain the rumen's microbial population, along with milk production and body condition!

But can a cow function just as well on poor, low-quality inputs? Can she produce milk up to her genetic potential on 'whatever we feed her'? Can she maintain optimal reproductive function? Simply stated... no! While the cow will make the best use of whatever feeds and forages she is given, there is a point at which her unique system will start to decline, impacting her body condition, health, reproduction and production. Quality forages, feeds and nutrient supplements will help her maintain necessary body and production demands. This is critical to her functionality.

Feed your cows the best and invest in your bottom line.



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CHECK IT OUT!