

DAIRYINFO

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Taking service to another level!

Pre-Fresh Feeding Practices & Calf Birth weights? (II)

Increased glucose production by the dam during late pregnancy holds perhaps the greatest potential to increase calf birth weight, as glucose delivery to fetus is believed to be a limiting factor with respect to fetal growth. Numerous studies have indicated that increased glucose production by the dairy cow immediately before calving can improve fresh cow health and performance; making this a desirable goal. Cornell researchers have calculated that fetal growth would increase by a maximum of 42.5 grams for each .45 kg of "glucogenic supplement" (e.g. calcium propionate or propylene glycol) consumed by the dam during late pregnancy. If .9 kg of such a supplement were consumed daily for a 3-week pre-fresh period, the resulting increase in calf birth weight would be a maximum of 1.8 kg and if the average birth weight of calves did increase by 1.8 kg, a significantly higher incidence of dystocia should not occur unless there are problems with excessive body condition during the dry period and/or insufficient frame size in first calf heifers. Furthermore, any actual increase in birth weight would likely be lower, as feeding such a high level of "glucogenic supplement" is improbable given the cost of such a practice and possibility of appetite suppression. This can impact your current (and future) bottom line.

Conclusion: Can feeding a pre-fresh ration increase calf birth weight? Perhaps, but an increase of more than .9 or 1.8 kg is unlikely. Remember that proper preparation of the cow for the upcoming lactation is the primary goal of the dry period and pre-fresh ration. The likelihood of compromised fresh cow performance is much greater for those animals on an inadequate pre-fresh program, but the potential damage doesn't stop there. Colorado research with beef cattle has shown a reduced ability to generate body heat in calves born to dams consuming either protein or energy restricted rations during the last 90-95 days of pregnancy. This could reduce the thriftiness or survivability of newborn calves subjected to cold climates. Although not a consistent finding, a Kansas study found beef calves born to protein-restricted dams (during the last 100 days of pregnancy) had a reduced ability to absorb immunoglobulin G, the predominant component of a calf's passive immunity. Thus, the potential exists to compromise calf health as well as cow performance when inadequate rations are fed during the dry and pre-fresh periods. In closing, consider this final question: if pre-fresh rations significantly increase fetal growth during late pregnancy, why don't more of the millions of US dairy cattle that consume pre-fresh rations give birth to calves that are too big?

By Dr. R. Tom Bass, II, DVM, PhD - Renaissance Nutrition

Forages... after the harvest!

Home-grown forages are essential for the productivity and profitability of your entire herd. Forages are the starting point for solid, practical nutrition. Once the harvest has been completed it is a good idea to:

- Test forages to determine nutrient value
- Calculate forage inventory for winter
- Determine cow numbers to be fed from available forages
- Allocate forages by quality
- Work with a W-S Feed nutritionist to balance rations for heifers, dry cows and lactating cows using available forages

Testing forages to determine dry matter and nutrient content is essential to a sound nutritional program. Forages often "look" better than the analysis reveals. Furthermore, nutrient values vary from year to year, making it a challenge to balance rations. When the nutrient value [of forage] is unknown and a ration is formulated, what is actually fed can increase feed costs unnecessarily – or fall short of meeting basic nutritional requirements of your livestock. Either way, production and bottom line profit is impacted. Having forages analyzed is an investment in the body condition, health and productivity of your entire herd. This also applies to the growth, conditioning and development of replacement heifers and dry cows. Any losses in conditioning and growth at these critical times will critically impact their next lactation.

Ensuring sufficient forage inventories is important as we go into these winter months. Calculations should be made to ensure there is enough forage of *sufficient quality* to feed the entire herd. Working closely with your nutritionist, you can determine how much forage is needed for each group this winter. Once quality and inventories are known, it is easier to formulate a balanced, best-cost ration for the coming months. I will be happy to help you with this process, making the most of home-grown forages during the cold winter months ahead.

(Edited from Dairy Nutrition Strategies, Amaral-Phillips, U of Kentucky)



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!

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W-S FEED... THE TEAM FOR SUCCESS!

SOLUTIONS for SUCCESS!

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Wishing you~

...and your family the very best this Christmas and throughout the coming New Year ~ 2017! Thank you for your business and support this past year. It is a pleasure working with you... and as a part of your farm team!

Merry Christmas!

It's getting mighty cold these days...

If your cows could sing, would they celebrate the Holidays with this song: "The weather outside is frightful... but our stalls are so delightful"? Winter weather brings cold and often damp, wet conditions. Whether your cows are in a free-stall facility or in tie stalls, the environment in which they live is critical to their health and ability to produce at an optimum level. Take time to evaluate your facility this winter before the cold weather sets in. The goal of an evaluation is to ensure your cows are in a draft-free, well-ventilated building with clean, dry bedding. Cows can handle cold weather if they are kept comfortable and well-fed! Wet and damp conditions in a facility can also contribute to air quality concerns, which may lead to health-related problems, particularly respiratory disease. This winter, keep your cows' well-being in mind. They are, after all, an essential part of your farm. When cows are comfortable – they will perform time after time! It might not seem like much, but cow comfort is worth your time and their well-being. And if they could sing, they would serenade you with carols of contentment... and the pleasant sounds of making more milk.



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Wishing you ~

DECEMBER 2016

CHECK IT OUT!