



DAIRYINFO

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HEAT STRESS AFFECTS HEIFERS & THEIR GROWTH RATE...

Cooling cows is known to have an economic return, but there are advantages to keeping heifers comfortable as well when the weather turns hot and humid!

Warming temperatures this spring serve as a reminder to be prepared for the arrival of higher summer temperatures, along with higher humidity, that are a certainty. In fact, some of these temperature extremes have already occurred and will more than likely be ever present in July!

Last summer's extreme heat tested humans, cows and calves. We often prepare for cooling cows with additional fans, soaking, etc. But calves and heifers can feel the heat too. According to several studies, calves have a "thermal neutral zone" which is from about 15-24° C in still air. The thermal neutral zone is the temperature range in which the animal does not need to expend extra energy to either keep warm or to stay cool. The range varies due to age, feed intake, body fat levels and hair coat thickness. The stress of maintaining normal body functions in cold or hot weather decreases the heifer's growth rate and a producer's bottom line. It's important to keep heifers as comfortable as possible outside of those temperatures.

Remember that heat and humidity can combine to cause even more stress than is reflected on the thermometer. Below is a list of visible signs of heat stress in calves that are important warning signs to recognize:

- Reduced movement
- Faster breathing rates
- Open-mouthed panting
- Decreased feed intake (*graph A*)*
- Increased water consumption
- Slower growth and development (*graph B*)*

What can you do to [help] minimize heat stress for your calves and heifers? During the hot summer months, it is recommended that hutches be moved into the shade or cover them with shade cloth. It is also critical to supply unlimited amounts of cool, fresh water to avoid dehydration. A heat-stressed calf can drink up to six gallons of water daily (and growing heifers much more).

Fill and/or change the water in buckets at *least three times* each day. Calves may wait to eat in the cooler evening hours, so make sure they have plenty of water and food for overnight. Other ideas include propping the back edge of a calf hutch up about six-to-eight inches, allowing an increase in air flow.

Additionally, it is recommended that calves and heifers are not handled or vaccinated except in the cool, early morning hours.

Addressing heat stress in calves and heifers makes good economic sense! Heat-stressed calves may grow more slowly, reach maturity later and be delayed in entering the milking herd. Worse yet, you might even lose valuable heifer calves or heifers.

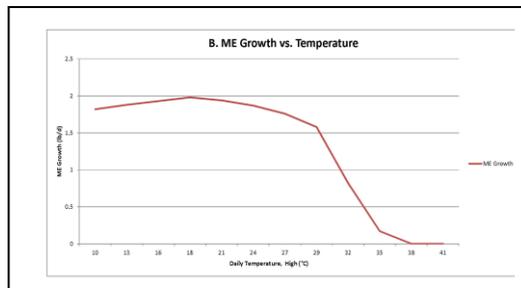
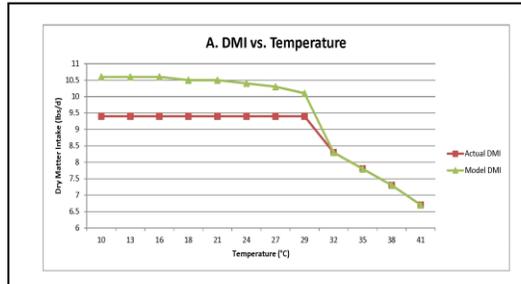
Lastly, what about heifers ready to calve for the first time? Research has shown that decreasing heat stress in dry cows can result in *increased calf size*, as well as

improved colostrum quality. So pre-calving heifers should not be exposed to extreme heat either.

Minimizing heat stress on calves and heifers can definitely impact and increase their growth/development rate and even improve their chances of entering the milking herd on schedule.

Work this summer to not only keep your cows cool, but your heifers and calves too!

(Edited from an article by Roberta Osborne, Michigan State University Extension)
 *Graphs prepared by Shepherd/Shivas - 2013



Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or want to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Call me! My goal is to help you. That's Renaissance's commitment!

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How Comfortable Are Your Cows?

If your cows could give you a “cow comfort and facilities management report card”, what grade do you think you would receive? The importance of cow comfort in all kinds of weather and every season are critical. There are several issues on a farm that can make a difference in the health and productivity of your cows. Let's consider just a couple on the list.

- Do your cows suffer from overcrowding? This is a big problem on many farms. If you have no other option, try doing it where it will impact you less: mid- to late-lactation groups. The best way to deal with overcrowding is not allowing it to happen. Overcrowding creates an environment for stress, along with increased risks for environmental mastitis and lameness. Giving your cows plenty of “elbow room” can positively impact their health and productivity.
- Provide free-choice access to plenty of fresh, clean water and feed a balanced ration at all times.
- Addressing cow comfort in a positive way is an investment, offering many excellent benefits.

So, how does your report card look? Cow comfort really pays off.



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CHECK IT OUT!