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FEEDING STRATEGIES TO COMBAT HEAT STRESS

The arrival of steamy summer weather can quickly push your dairy cows out of their comfort zone. However, changing your feed management, while adopting other recommended practices, can help reduce the impact of high temperatures on your herd's milk production and comfort. Cows are most comfortable when the ambient temperature ranges between five and 25 degrees Celsius. The air's relative humidity can also affect how warm the temperature feels, but 25 degrees is a good benchmark to keep in mind when dealing with the negative effects of heat stress. Heat stress symptoms include elevated respiration rate, elevated rectal temperature, impaired metabolism and lowered reproductive performance. Above 25 degrees, cows will change their behaviour to reduce the effect of that stress. Cows, like all animals under heat stress, try to stabilize their body temperature within a very narrow range.

The close connection between feed intake and milk production, and the normal tendency to eat less when it is hot, is a key reason why milk production often drops in the summer. By ensuring your cows get fresh feed, you can use their natural behaviour to stimulate their appetites.

Some farms commonly feed a total mixed ration every other day. Since fermented feeds like haylage and corn silage spoil and heat quickly when it's hot outside, eliminate this practice during the summer. Mixing fresh diets daily or twice daily is important to promote feed intake. It's also important to push feed up more frequently. This chore is still not automated on many farms and, like many seemingly small tasks, the importance of doing it frequently really can be overlooked. Many dairy farms push feed up two to four times a day to promote feed intake. Adding two feed push-ups to your routine during hot weather will counteract some of your cows' tendencies to eat less.

Dairy cows can dramatically increase water consumption during hot weather. To ensure good water availability, check flow rate, cleanliness of troughs or bowls and accessibility by all cows, particularly timid, first-lactation cows. Cows will also perform better when kept cooler. There are four main methods to cool them when the mercury rises: conduction, convection, radiation and evaporation. The most efficient way to improve cooling is convection-increasing the air flow over cows-and augmenting evaporative cooling by wetting the cows or the air around them. Also keep in mind, if you have overcrowding, heat dispersion through cow separation will be reduced.

Hot weather typically affects high-producing cows more than their lower producing herdmates. High-producing cows tend to have higher feed intakes and generate more metabolic heat and heat from feed digestion. This increases their stress load compared to lower producers with less feed intake.

The five recommended best practices for when the Temperature-Humidity Index exceeds 72 (which is considered the level when heat stress begins) include:

- providing shade;
- considering average temperature and humidity when deciding on a cooling system;
- using evaporative cooling if temperatures are near or above normal cow temperatures for significant portions of the summer;
- using evaporative cooling in combination with tunnel ventilation and feedline soaking for very high temperature and humidity combinations;
- keeping milking parlours, holding pens and housing areas cool.

Adjusting for temperatures this summer can also include a discussion with your sales representative. You want to ensure mineral levels, added buffers and non-structural carbohydrate levels, in particular, are optimal for the season. (Omafra and Milk Producer Magazine)

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CELEBRATE DAIRY

June is Dairy Month. We all need to support and encourage our dairy industry! That's what we do every day, working with you to feed your cows efficiently and effectively. Join us in supporting the dairy industry locally and nationally... encouraging people everywhere to take advantage of the many available dairy products, which are among the safest and most nutritious foods you can eat. Our dairy industry is helping to feed Canada... and the world! We are proud to serve dairy producers with quality nutrition, products and services, management insights and information, agronomic support... all the tools needed for maintaining the health, productivity and profitability of dairy animals.



Happy National Dairy Month!

Cheers!

**WATER ANALYSIS**

Water, both availability and quality, are critical for your cows. It is important to obtain an accurate water-quality analysis on a regular basis, which begins with proper water sampling. When you're assessing the quality of your herd's water supply, take two samples, advises Dave Beede, professor of dairy nutrition at Michigan State University. Take one sample as close to the well or primary source of the water supply as possible. Then, take a second sample after the storage compartment of the reserve tank/pressure tank or as close to the cows as you can. Avoid sampling from tanks and other water sources that cows come into contact with, since this can contaminate the sample.

Submit the sample for a standard lab analysis for livestock water. Then, for instance, if the lab report shows iron concentrations greater than 0.3 parts/ million (ppm), or either sulfate or chloride concentrations greater than 250 to 500 ppm, take two more samples and send each to a different certified lab for another analysis and to obtain a comparison. "This may seem like over-kill at the time, but water treatment systems can be a major investment, so it is important to know absolutely for sure that concentrations of a particular analyte are in excess," Beede says. Water quality is important to your livestock! Also, when collecting water for analysis, label and seal two additional samples in screw-top bottles to serve as back-ups and as an historical record.

(Edited from an article by Kim Schoonmaker, Dairy Herd Management)

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