

Keeping your fussy dry cows happy

Your couches are uncomfortable! This food you offered me does not taste the greatest and there is not enough of it so I'm going to have to eat again when I get home. Can you turn on the air conditioning it is too hot in here. Do you have any more to drink?

If you heard this from friends or family if they came to visit, you likely would not be too excited to have them come back to visit. As herd advisors, veterinarians unfortunately tend to get focused on pointing out the negatives. We see and comment on the things that we feel are opportunities to improve performance on your operation and can come off looking like that ungrateful guest. With summer coming on and with the recent P5 announcements looking for more milk we need to make sure we are focused on making sure our cows are comfortable and ready to deliver. We tend to focus on the milking herd and don't consider dry cows and springing heifers. The goal for an effective dry cow facility is to maximize cow comfort, minimize environmental and social stresses and provide unlimited access to a well-balanced ration and good water sources.

Lying, standing, walking:

My preferred housing option for dry cows and springing heifers would be a deep bedded pack. Free stall or tie stalls can work for dry cows and heifers more than 4 weeks prior to calving. If using tie stalls for far off dry cows it is really important to try to get them exercise prior to calving. Dry cow pens should offer 150 square feet of effective bedded pack space per closeup cow. Far away dry cow pens or closeup heifer pens require closer to 100-125 square feet of bedded pack per animal. When calculating the square footage of a pen do not include the scrape alleys and potentially discount the first 2 to 3 feet of the bedded pack if it is narrow opening to the pen or if is an area that is tough to maintain adequate clean bedding.

Social interactions:

Adding cattle to the dry cow pens should happen no more often than once weekly as they often turn the social structure of the pen on its head, and they group needs to establish the new pecking order with the introduction of new cows to a group. Negative effects of these social interactions are made worse when pens are crowded, reducing lying times and increasing competition at the feed bunk and water sources. Scrape alleys should offer safe, non-slippery footing. Cows need to be confident with good traction when at the feed bunk and water sources.

Heat stress and air quality:

As we approach summer, we have already had days this year where cows experienced heat stress, do not overlook the importance of keeping your dry cows cooled. Just like the milking herd, cool cows eat and drink more and have less complications in the fresh period. Fans blowing on dry cows or tunnel ventilation are effective ways to help with heat stress. If using fans, make sure you have enough fans to minimize "dead" spots in the pen where airspeeds are not effective to keep cows cool.

Water Sources:

Access to clean fresh water is key to keeping cows cool and maximizing dry matter intake. Every pen should have at least two water sources with a minimum of 3-6" of drinking space per cow and a maximum of 15-20 cows per water source. Water sources should be cleaned at least weekly. Water is one of the most important nutrients in a cow's ration and anything that negatively affects its intake will reduce overall dry matter intake.

Ration:

There are multiple ways or styles of formulating dry cow rations to minimize transition health issues. Not all styles will work on every farm. My preference is the straw based or "goldy locks" diet. It is easy to keep consistent and minimize



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changes throughout the year. Anionic salts, rations utilizing calcium binders, or the old-fashioned component feed rations can work well too. The key to whatever program you decide, is to use make sure you are doing it well. If things change in terms of feed sources or any other management changes should be communicated with your nutrition and herd consultant so adjustments to the ration can be made in a timely fashion before the issues with cow health arise.

Health promoting products:

Use of rumensin in the ration or as Kexxtone boluses, calcium boluses, teat sealants, mastitis and scour vaccines should be used if indicated in your herd to minimize negative health outcomes. If you are using rumensin to help with fresh cow health issues, Kexxtone boluses are your best option because its effectiveness is not reliant on feed intake. Analysis of transition cow health outcomes and milk production performance will indicate if any of these "extras" would provide benefits to your herd. The decision to use of any of these products should made with the advice of your herd consultants.

Rod Wieringa DVM

Fly Control

Have you heard the buzz? Large animal technicians are now offering fly prevention in combination with dehorning services. Ask your LA tech for more information!



Upcoming stat holidays

The clinic will be closed Canada Day July 1st and the Civic Holiday Weekend July 31st to August 2nd. As always, veterinarians will be available 24-7 for emergency service. The Saturday fee schedule will remain unchanged from non-stat weekends.



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Covid-19 protocols

With the increasing presence of Covid-19 in our area, our team is taking additional precautions during our farm visits, as highlighted below, to help mitigate the spread of this disease in our community. Please be aware that as this pandemic develops, we may have to adjust our procedures in response.

Veterinary farm visits

- Once on farm, we will try to maintain a distance of at least six feet from people wherever practically possible
- Care will be taken to wash and disinfect hands and contacted tools and equipment before re-entering our vehicle
- A mask will be worn whenever practically possible, especially in closed air spaces or when physical distancing is not possible. We would like our clients to do the same while we are on farm.

Technician farm visits

- Techs will continue to assist veterinarians as necessary. The same precautions as above will apply
- Technicians will continue to provide services, such as dehorning, but we ask that no farm personnel are in the immediate vicinity during their visit

Clinic procedures

- Our clinic will remain open, but business hours may be subject to change
- Clients will be met at the door by one of our customer care representatives
- Purchases will be set out at the door
- Laboratory samples will be received at the door

If you have experienced any Covid-like symptoms or have had exposure to someone with symptoms, we urge you to please notify us before your next vet visit so we can take the appropriate precautions.

We thank you for assistance in helping us continue to provide veterinary care while considering the health of yourselves and our staff.

Stay healthy!

