The Scoop

A Case of The What-Ifs

Hi guys. I wanted to talk with you a dozen or more times over the past couple of weeks, but everything is so volatile, so up-in-the-air, that every time a topic came up, a new one appeared. It's been a rough roller-coaster ride of a spring, and it hasn't stopped yet. It's caused a bad case of what-ifs out in the country. Maybe it's time we talked about them a bit.

What NOT to Cut

One of the things that is a fact right at the moment is that the milk price dropped dramatically. Hopefully, it is very temporary. In the meantime, like it or not, we have to cut back on costs. The easiest to cut is the feed costs, but you can also go too far when trying to make those cuts-things that can significantly reduce performance in the next year or two. Here are 5 things NOT to cut during this time:

1. Cutting out protein for the fresh cows.

Of all the cows that are in the barn, the fresh cows are the most profitable. They are also your short term future. **Cows milk an additional 200-225 pounds of milk for each additional pound of peak milk.** In other words, the higher the peak, the more milk she will persist in giving throughout her whole lactation. **Cutting the protein to a cow that is 0-120 days in milk can lower her peak milk by 10 pounds or more, resulting in a production loss of 2000-2250 pounds of milk during her lactation.** The strategy is to focus on those fresh cows and cut back mid lactation cows and tail-enders.

2. Cutting out the dry cow program.

Along those same lines is making sure the cows freshen in well, so they can peak. Nothing slows down potential milk production more than metabolic problems at freshening. **The dry cow program, especially the last three weeks before freshening, is critical to fresh cow health and future peak milk.** The strategy is to focus on a good dry cow program for at least the last three weeks of gestation.

3. Cutting the starter feed to baby calves.

We've always known that feeding calves is really important, but research today **shows that nutrition in preweaning determines the animal's future potential for milk during her lifetime.** It is critical to give good colostrum, milk or high quality milk replacer, and a good starter to develop a good, strong rumen and constitution to live up to her genetic potential. Cutting here may affect a calf for

The spring checklist...

It's been a busy spring so far, and when that happens, a lot of the little details get lost. Some are really important. Here are a few:

1. Add yeasts or buffers now.
Get the rumens used to them before the heat hits and you lose butterfat.

2. Add Clarifly now.
Clarifly takes some time in the cow's system to be effective. The best use of this is to put it in before the flies are bad.

3. Worm the cows and youngstock.
Before going out to pasture, make sure they are in the best possible health.

4. Get your heat abatement system ready.
Make sure everything is running well before the heat hits. This includes dusting off the fans.

5. Fence out stagnant water.
Fence out the stagnant ponds or water. Bacteria, parasites and algae thrive in these areas, creating real health hazards such red nose, liver flukes and mastitis.

6. Check your feed inventories for yeasts and mycotoxins.
The feed last year was a little funky to begin with. If yeasts and molds were present during harvest, they explode this time of year. Check your feed to make sure it isn't a problem.

Odds & Ends.....

Prices heard this week:
Corn: $2.38-2.64 per bu.
Soybeans: $7.90-7.98 per bu.

150 RFV Hay: Large squares are worth approx. 0.99-1.19 per point of RFV.

Springers: $975-1100 med grade
Cull cows: $0.45-0.52 per pound
Bull calves: $60-85

Connections:

Call us at 1-800-700-9334 or email us at mctech@centurytel.net to get connected

* For sale: Square hay 3x3x7.5 137 RFQ
* For sale: Robotic calf feeder-excellent cond..
* For sale: Sorghum-sudanlage reasonable!
* For sale: Heifer raising services
*For sale: Weaverline electric feed cart
*For sale: Young cows and springers, red factor.
*For sale: Pasteurizer for colostrum or milk
*For sale: CFS feed carts, good working order
*For sale: Electric semen thaw canister
*For sale: 1 yr old Boumatic double six parlor
*For sale: 4500 gallon N-tech manure tanker
*For sale: 18' and 24' ValMetal silo unloaders and 16x60 belt and 24x30 belt.

If you have something to sell or are looking for something-don't hesitate to call or email. There is no charge for the posting.

Some folks may not have lost all their marbles, but there's definitely a hole in the bag.- anonymous

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her entire lifetime. The strategy is to focus on nutrition pre and post weaning, and then to limit feed to older heifers, where more waste might occur.

4. Cutting the mineral out for the heifers. Heifers need mineral not only to show heats and for breeding, but they need mineral for growth as well. If mineral is cut out at one of these critical growth periods, the heifer can develop a weaker bone structure-more porous in nature. This becomes a problem when she has to develop a calf and colostrum during the last part of her gestation-she has no reserve to draw from and she will go down. **Many heifers with this issue will have problems getting up after freshening and quickly become culls.** A better strategy is to precision feed or limit the amount of feed to the heifers and make sure they receive mineral and salt every day.

5. Cutting out the basics.
It's good to remember that a cow needs water, carbohydrates, fiber, protein, fats/oils, minerals and vitamins. If you're not feeding one of these in some form-it's going to be a problem down the road-in the form of disease or lowered production or both. There are plenty of ways to meet these basic needs of the cow and cut costs at the same time. **The better strategy is to examine every additive beyond the critical needs for its value to the herd and return on investment.** There you can cut costs short term and not feel any permanent pain.

Feeding Milk to Cows

We keep hearing about creameries dumping milk and in our own area, some of the creameries have requested that milk be reduced. Another what-if to talk about is, what if the creameries ask for a substantial amount of milk to be reduced for awhile? Do you just waste it? There are a few options, and one is to feed it back to the cows.

To start out with, you can feed milk to lactating cows. **It's a myth that cows can't utilize the sugar or fat in milk. Milk is full of nutrients and fits well into a cow's diet-cutting back on the supplemental protein and energy.** The reason we don't already feed it to cows is beacause it's expensive and it kind of defeats the purpose, right? The only cow that can't receive it is a dry cow. The milk is too high in potassium for her.

There are a couple of things to watch for. First, it is possible the raw milk will contain samonella or Johnes and may be a risk for herds that generally have trouble with these diseases.

The other issue is storage. It's best to feed up what amount was going to be dumped in a day. That way the milk has less of a chance to develop bacterias or yeasts which can be potentially harmful to the lactating dairy cow.

The milk should also be held in a tank that can be washed before and after every use to prevent contamination.

Feeding rates depend on the overall moisture of the current feed. Try not to go over 58% moisture for the total mix or the cows will have lowered dry matter intakes and the feed will break down and heat. Typical rates are 2-7 pounds of dry matter per head-most are at the lower rates because the moisture level of the total feed can get too high.

But overall, it can be fed successfully to the lactating herd (not dry cows!), if needed.

THE BUZZ...

Here are some of the latest things going on out there and our personal opinions of them.

Dry Cow diets:

Years ago, dry cow diets mainly consisted of a round bale and corn silage-some, in fact, still do. And they worked-for the most part.

You might have noticed, that diet doesn't seem to quite work anymore-you have to feed extra supplements to make it work or you have to treat with extra stuff after the cows are fresh. So why doesn't it work anymore?

We could talk about this a long time, but the dry cows can't tolerate high levels potassium or starch.

Potassium, found in high levels in grass or alfalfa, is the main culprit in causing clinical or sub-clinical milk fever. It messes up the way they utilize calcium.

Our grass and alfalfa both contain high levels because of the years of manure put on the fields. The high potassium, by the way, is great for lactating cows. Just not dry cows.

Years ago, an awesome corn year was when the corn produced 150 bu. to the acre. Grain and starch levels were low in corn silage. Now, most places are disappointed with 150 bu. per acre. The corn silage itself has went to 40-50% corn (30-40% starch) on a regular basis. Just think, if you fed 50 pounds of corn silage-which is not uncommon-you're feeding the equivalent of 20-25 pounds of corn. That's just too much. No wonder it causes ketosis-clinical and subclinical.

The best solution is to start off in the spring by planning on making some dry cow forage. Corn silage that has high vegetative tonnage but low corn levels, small grains silage or grass (as long as you add magnesium) or sorghum sudanlage that is checked clean of nitrates. You can still use the other feeds in small amounts, but adding a separate forage for dry cows can save you a lot of money in supplements and a lot of headache further down the road.

Facebook: I should have the Facebook account up and running by next week. Like us and let's talk!

Check us out at monsonconsulting.net

What to Do with Heifers

Heifers, as a rule, are a future revenue source. The problem is the word future. Right now, with feed inventories and income as tight as ever, we need to manage this part of the herd more closely. Replacement animals account for about 15-20% of milk production costs. You need only profitable animals entering the herd. Here are some suggestions:

1. Put your money where it counts.

Evaluate your replacements and figure exactly how many you actually need each year. Figure in a little wiggle room. Then it's time to start reducing the heifer inventories.

2. Get rid of heifers that had problems.

Heifers that had severe respiratory or intestinal problems in the past as calves will never produce like they should of and are often the bottom animals in the herd. It's hard-especially if you worked hard to save a calf-but it's for the best to get rid of them. The sooner the better.

3. Take a look at the bottom third.

Another way to get rid of potential poor-doers is to look at the heifers that were born from the bottom third of your herd. I know you always want to give them a chance, but statistically, they are usually the next generation of the bottom third.

4. Breed your bottom third to beef.

Breeding the bottom third of your cows to beef is a strategy that may bring in better income than raising their young to enter the herd. Beef calves typically sell for more at market.

5. Breed your heifers later.

This goes against most of the info that you've heard for the 10 years, but breeding so that the heifers freshen in at 20-22 months is too early for the majority of the herds out there.

The idea looked good. The earlier you could get the heifers milking in the herd, the earlier you could start making money on them.

The problem is, the heifers need to be at least 85% of the weight and stature of a mature cow or they are just not physically mature enough to take on calving and lactation.

Physically immature heifers have more calving and transition problems and need to continue using nutritional and metabolic resources to grow vs. produce milk.

We can try to get the heifers to the right size before freshening, but they need to gain over two pounds per head per day-almost impossible and very expensive.

The sweet spot for having the animals freshen in is 23-25 months old. Heifers may be on feed longer during those couple of extra months, but the payoff is huge: **heifers at 23-25 months old will produce 3-7 pounds more milk per head per day and a 20% improvement on heifer conception rate.**

5. Limit feed your heifers.

When a cow increases her intake during lactation, her milk production increases. When a heifer increases intake, she gets fat. Limit feed the heifers to only what they need to eat.

So good to talk to you guys again!