The Scoop

A few Small Issues

It feels like a very long time since we've spoke, but this year has a way of seeming like forever. There have been so many major issues that have come along and it has been difficult to navigate them all. It makes our small issues look less important. Still, it's good to discuss what we've seen in our world so far this year. Here are a few of them.

Early Calvings

The cows and heifers this year, for the most part, have been calving early on a good 80 plus percent of the farms. And not just in our area; I've talked to nutritionists from southern and eastern Wisconsin and they are having the same issue too.

The cows and heifers are having their calves 7-14 days earlier on average, some up to 21 days. The calves are born fully developed and healthy, but the cows have not had enough time in the dry period and some take weeks after freshening to bag up, while others experience metabolic issues. The problem started on most farms in April and for some, is still happening.

I've been searching for answers-in fact, that's why we haven't spoke, I wanted to give you the reason why this was occurring. What I have is a lot of theories as to why early calvings occur, and what we could try to do to prepare for them. Here is what we found out:

1. Using a lot of corn silage.

Corn silage tends to be high in chromium, which helps regulate blood sugar. Cows fed high chromium in late lactation and/or the dry period have a higher risk of earlier calving. If you feed high corn silage diets-plan for calving to occur 7 days earlier.

2. Using anionic salts during the entire dry period.

Anionic salts were designed to be used in the last 3 weeks before freshening. The salts trigger the cow to utilize her reserve calcium more efficiently. **Some studies suggest that they may trigger other hormones as well that lend to early calvings.** Feeding a lower level of anionic salts may be the answer for a one group dry cow diet. Work with your nutritionist on this one.

3. Mold or yeast is present in the feed.

Certain molds have hormone-like attributes and yeasts interfere with metabolic balance. The presence of these can cause abortions, but usually not this late term. However, it's not a bad idea to feed a good mold binder just in case.

Winter Checklist...

I'm dusting off the winter checklist, we both need a few reminders:

1. Adjust the lighting
Extended photo light periods can improve appetites and production.

2. Go over inventories.
The information can help determine what can be fed at what rate, so you don't run out.

3. Worm everything.
As soon as the ground freezes, worm the cows and young stock. Don't wait until they look thin before you get this done.

4. Get out the calf jackets.
Jackets warm calves by 40%. Figure out how many you need and get them on.

5. Check out wind breaks and shelters for outdoor animals.
The wind is the number one environmental stress in the winter. Make sure the outdoor animals can escape it.

6. Switch to a winter dip.
Teat dips should be switched in the winter to prevent frostbite. Even more importantly, dry teat ends after final dipping.

7. Increase the vitamins.
If you decreased vitamins for summer feeding, it's time to increase them for the stored feeds.

Odds & Ends.....

Prices heard this week:
Corn: $3.41-3.63 per bu.
Soybeans: $10.37-10.70 per bu.

150 RFV Hay: Large squares are worth approx. 1.00-1.20 per point of RFV.

Springers: $1000-$1200 med grade
Cull cows: $0.47-0.62 per pound
Bull calves: $75-125

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*Wanted: small bale chopper for straw
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*Wanted: Beef bull
*For sale: Wheat straw, lg bales stored under cover.
*For sale: Beef hay and large square straw bales
*Wanted: Bagger
*For sale: Valmetal #530 feed cart, used 1 year
*For sale: 2nd or 3rd crop round bales
*Wanted: Young cows or springing heifers
*For sale: Dairy quality hay, big squares, round bales or baleage.

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 problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.-Laurence Peter

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4. Use of calving ease bulls

Calving ease bulls have a history of calves being born early. If you use calving ease bulls, plan for calves to be born up to two weeks early.

5. Short voluntary waiting periods

It might just be the numbers. Shortening up the voluntary waiting period from 60-80 days down to 40-50, shortens the lactation period. You might have to adjust your numbers.

6. Better overall genetics.

This is an interesting theory. We know that the calves born nowadays need a higher plane of nutrition than they did previously, due to better genetics causing more rapid growth. With sexed semen, more rapidly improving genetics, and better feed perhaps the calf is growing faster in the womb as well.

So, all of these still do not answer the questions: why this year? What could have possibly occurred state wide?
All the data we compiled seemed to have no single similarity that occurred in most herds. For now, if you have any of situations we discussed, there are a few things you can do. **In the meantime, plan on drying the cows off for a 55-60 day dry period.**

Increasing levels of Mold & Yeast

Overall, it was a pretty decent crop year. Still, there is feed with excessive amounts of yeast and some molds this year. Why is that? Shouldn't this be the year of no mold?
Molds and yeasts find their way into crops when the crop is damaged, diseased or not ensiled properly. In a "good year", the potential of plant stress is lower. But not gone. Some of our current practices open the door for mold and yeast growth. Here are some to lend to the problem:

1. Unbalanced soil fertility

Excessive or low nitrogen and low potassium levels will increase the risk of stalk rot. **Excessive nitrogen with low potassium levels in the soil further increase the risk of stalk rot and encourage mycotoxin production.** Having balanced fertility plan will help eliminate this risk factor.

2. Long-term no tillage soils

It's no secret that the high residue left behind on no-till acres harbors mold and yeast spores that can infect the next crop-they don't kill out over winter. But nobody is going to stop no-till planting as it's just smart and cost effective. Instead, think strategy. Plant a non-susceptible crop during your normal crop rotation. If the no-till acreage hasn't been rotated out of corn for several years, use a fungicide to reduce plant damage from mold or yeast spores.

3. Pushing forage digestibility limits.

Never thought you'd hear a nutritionist say that, right? We're all about forage digestibility because it means more milk. But as the digestibility goes up, the lignin goes down.
Lignin is what protects the plant from invasion from diseases and spores. **The lower the lignin, the higher the risk of molds and yeasts forming in the plants.** So do we plant varieties with higher lignin levels to improve plant health and lower the risk of molds and yeasts?

THE BUZZ...

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

Magnesium levels:

This year, we had magnesium problems in lactating cows for the first time in several years.

In grasses especially, the plants grew optimally and when they do that, they have a weird mineral set-up: low calcium and magnesium-and moderate levels of potassium. In the ration, we add calcium and magnesium to balance out the grass and it works. This year, despite feeding recommended amounts of magnesium and calcium, there were herds not only deficient, but some that developed grass tetany-a potentially fatal metabolic disease in cows. This even happened to herds that fed alfalfa and not grass.

After some investigation, we found out that the magnesium oxide was not the same as before-the percentage of magnesium is the same, but due to some impurities in the feed itself, not as available. So the magnesium levels that worked before, do not work now-they need to be raised because of this change. (One of the people I spoke with from Ames, Iowa said that they were planning on changing the NRC levels for it in the next year or so). As a precaution and because it was unexpected-we're now checking on impurities in calcium as well, just in case.

For now, feed a higher level of magnesium oxide than your old level or use a little magnesium sulfate instead.

High sugar corn:

Some folks that fed green corn silage this year got a bit of a nasty surprise this year: the corn silage had higher sugar levels in it this year.

Typically, this is a good thing. The higher sugar levels speed fermentation faster and improve the stability if the feed. However, suddenly feeding those high sugar levels to cows causes microbial off-balances and interferes with digestion. At best, some cows get loose and gassy. At worst, the cows stop eating and are at risk of a twisted stomach.

The last few years, we didn't have enough sunlight and heat to really develop the sugars in the corn silage crop. Next year, if we have the same type of weather, do not feed corn silage until it goes through it's initial fermentation: 7-21 days. No matter how good it smells.

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Nope, that would mean lower milk production-so that doesn't make sense. However, knowing that higher digestible feeds have a higher potential for molds and yeasts, we can strategize.

If you plant a highly digestible feed, be aware that proper harvest and fermentation is more important than ever. Proper moistures for your feed system. Using a preservative. Packing and covering. Use a facer if you have a bunker. Make sure bags and bunker covers don't have any rips in them. In other words, be extra vigilant about protecting that feed from any air. Oh, and feed a binder, just in case.

4. Narrow rows

In any crop, we're trying to obtain the highest yield per acre. Rows have become narrower and narrower as a result. **The problem is that air flow becomes restricted between the rows and the environment remains moist and warm-perfect for mold and yeast growth.** So we're not going back to wide rows, so again time to think strategy. Knowing your crop may be more susceptible to molds and yeasts, plan for it: use proper harvest and feedout techniques, just like you would if it was a highly digestible crop. Chances are that it is both.

5. Fluctuating temperatures at harvest.

During the fall, conditions are optimal for Fusarium ear mold and mycotoxin development. **Temperatures that alternate hot-cold between 45-75 degrees will really speed up growth of this particular mold.** If your silage was harvested during a time when the temperatures were rapidly changing, especially if the silage is on the dry side, the corn is at a higher risk for contamination. Get the feed tested and feed a binder.

Mold and yeast happen, sometimes, no matter how good the year is, but we can strategies and minimize the risk.

Neospora abortions

Abortions caused by Neospora seemed to be on the rise this year.

Neospora caninum is a protozoan parasite that causes abortion in cattle. **The most distinguishing characteristic of a neospora abortion is that it occurs 4-6 months of gestation.** Most abortions caused by disease or parasites cause early embryonic deaths or late term abortions.

Neospora is transferred to cattle from dogs or wild canines. Our most common infection source in this area is coyotes. Coyotes can carry the parasite in their system and their feces can infect water and pastures where animals are grazing or in the feed that is harvested for them.

The infected cow has no symptoms at all. 95% of the calves that are born are infected, but also appear normal. Typically, if a cow has aborted one time, it is unlikely that she will abort again-but her live calf will most likely be infected.

Right now, there really isn't a cure except to identify the infected cows and cull them from the herd. The best prevention we can do is to keep dogs and coyotes from areas where the cows drink water-the biggest source of infection. There is killed vaccines out that have some control-NeoGuard, Intervet-but the research is still out as to how effective it really is against neospora.

Are we already out of time? Good to talk with you again. Have a great Thanksgiving!