

Dollar Drain

Dollar Saving Tips for Texas Dairies

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Don't Cut Cow Cooling

With continued depressed milk prices anticipated and the Texas summer fast approaching, what management strategies should you adopt? One decision that should not even be considered is curtailing heat abatement programs. The impact of a Texas summer goes far beyond the actual calendar months. Cows freshening in April, May, and June, reach peak production during our hot months.

Without heat abatement programs in place and functioning, you reduce their lactation yield even farther. The impact of heat stress takes several forms. Dry matter intake is reduced by 6 to 16%. Due to energy being diverted to maintaining body temperature and a larger portion of energy consumed being directed to maintenance, there is a 30 to 50 % reduction in energy utilized for milk production. It is not uncommon to see milk production drop by 20%, a severe reduction in conception rates occurs, and death losses may escalate.

Two ways to reduce heat stress are: to provide a cooler environment and cool the cow. With today's tight economy, it might be easier to use and /or install fans and soakers than to modify housing structures. Another form of cooling that has proven to be effective in Texas has been the use of cooling ponds. No matter what, if you have a cooling system, don't wait until August to start using it. Kansas research has shown that you need to turn the water on at 70°F. As discussed last month, you need to increase soaking frequency as the temperature rises. For temperature between 70 and 80°F, soak cows every 15 minutes. As the temperature increases to 81-90°F wet the cows every 10 minutes and increase the frequency to every 5 minutes for temperatures over 90°F. Commercial timers are available off the shelf!

In general, mount fans every 10 feet for each foot of fan width. Locate sprinklers over the feed lane. The water and fans create a comfort zone that encourages dry matter consumption. If you don't already have a cooling system installed, start with fans and soakers in the holding pen. All the cows in the herd receive the benefit. These simple systems result in increased milk production of 4 to 12 pounds per cow per day. Don't give in to a short term cost-cutting solution that will cost you more money in lost production this summer and on into the fall.

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