

isolated upon arrival until convinced they didn't bring any unwanted guest(s). Isolate sick animals immediately and cull judiciously if necessary. Just like an insurance policy, we hope our herd health program is never needed and the money spent on premiums (or vaccinations) is basically wasted. However, not having an insurance policy or a herd health program when the circumstances arise where you do need them, can result in catastrophic financial loss.

NUTRITION IS A "MUST DO"

Maintaining top-notch nutrition programs is an absolute **"must do"** in today's high producing dairy herds. All too often, producers will balance a ration once and then continue to use the same formulation with constantly changing feed sources. Sooner or later, we finally notice there is a problem when the cows begin to tell us. By then it's too late. An improperly balanced ration or poor quality feed invariably lead to reduced milk production, metabolic problems, and poor reproductive efficiency. Work closely with a qualified nutritional consultant to stay ahead of problems. Test all new feed stuffs for nutrient content immediately upon arrival and re-adjust rations accordingly. If milk urea nitrogen (MUN) analysis is offered by your DHIA coop, take advantage of the opportunity to monitor the efficiency of protein utilization in rations. Test periodically for mycotoxins and anytime contaminated feeds are suspected.

Body condition scoring is an excellent means of monitoring the energy content in rations, however, make sure you calibrate scoring

techniques against an appropriate scale. Many herd owners appear to score their own cows about 0.5 point higher in body condition than would an impartial evaluator.

"The number one factor affecting the profitability of any animal breeding enterprise (dairy, beef, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats) is reproduction."

Although a half point in body condition may not seem like a big deal, the difference in fertility between a 2.5 and 3.0 body condition cow can be tremendous. Researchers have developed

standardized methods of scoring cows for body condition and have correlated these scores with fertility time and time again. Don't allow yourself to reset the scoring scale to fit your herd, use the standard BCS scale to critically and objectively evaluate the effectiveness of your nutrition program. If body condition scoring is not a must do, it's extremely high on the **"should do"** list.

The main reason nutrition is a **"must do"** for you, is because reproduction is a **"would like to do"** for your cows. Due to the phenomenon known as nutrient partitioning, all mammals direct available nutrients to various bodily functions on their own priority basis. The first and foremost **"must do"** on the nutrient partitioning scale, is body maintenance. This is basically the energy required to keep the heart pumping, lungs breathing, and all other essential organs doing their daily routine to keep the animal alive. Any energy available over and above maintenance requirements is directed to the **"should do"** category of production. This energy will primarily be used for milk production and to increase body weight. Finally, any energy left over after the maintenance and production demands are met can now be directed to the **"would like to do"** category of reproduction.

Although we may not always have our priorities straight, you can bet your cows always have their nutrient priorities straight. If energy becomes limited in the ration, reproduction is the first thing to go.

Hectic life in today's large herds seems to make it impossible to get everything done. However, before you start pushing jobs or tasks to a back burner to simmer, prioritize to make sure you know "what's really important". ♦

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