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Summer Strategies for Dairy!

Summers are a challenge when managing dairy cows. Dairy producers lose milk sales annually because of heat stress. The combination of high temperature and humidity is especially stressful to dairy cows, resulting in decreased feed intake, milk production, milk fat percentage, and reproductive efficiency.

Water, feed and shade are critical in managing heat stress. Water helps regulate temperature. As the temperature rises [above 75°F], the respiration rate increases and sweating occurs, increasing water loss from the lungs and skin.

Cows need to consume a large amount of water daily as temperatures rise. Therefore, an adequate water supply is essential. It should be conveniently located, clean, and preferably in a shaded location. Try providing a water supply in the holding area of the parlor, at the exit from the parlor, in every crossover alley and/or near the feed to improve cow comfort and performance.

Be sure to check dry matter intake. The cow's first response to heat stress is to reduce dry matter intake, especially as the temperature rises above 77°F. Usually the cow reduces forage consumption first, if she has a choice. This can result in rumen acidosis and cows going "off feed."

A consistent, well-balanced and palatable ration is essential to maintaining intake during heat stress. The summer feed slump can be minimized by using high quality forages. In some cases, the amount of forage is reduced to maintain intake. But milk fat percentage may decrease as forage consumption declines.

Total mixed rations (TMRs) help maintain intake by decreasing feed sorting and feed selection, thus reducing acidosis and "off-feed" problems. Some wet feed, such as silage, stimulates intake in a TMR, provided you feed the ration frequently. A wet TMR may spoil rapidly, especially with summer heat. Only feed what cows will clean up and feed them more frequently.

Because intake is reduced during hot weather, the concentration of nutrients in the ration may need to be increased (safely). Consider adjusting protein levels, along with a possible need for more energy in the ration. Increasing mineral consumption may also be beneficial. Feeding higher potassium and sodium levels only to the milking cows can effectively help reduce the impact of heat stress. However, if fed to dry cows, these mixes may cause increased udder edema.

Cows tend to eat more feed in the cool of the night rather than during the day. Adjust feeding rates so less is fed during the day and more at night, thus reducing feed spoilage and improving dry matter intake. Make sure the feed area is well lighted during nighttime feedings.



Understanding RFQ...

Relative Feed Value (RFV) is calculated by estimating the digestibility of the forage dry matter, and how much the cow can eat based on its "filling" capacity. However, cows sometimes perform differently even when fed forages of identical RFV. Variations in the digestibility of the NDF fraction probably account for these differences.

Fiber from grass and legumes naturally differs in digestibility, as it also does when grown under different ambient temperatures. For instance, the RFV of first-cutting alfalfa will be similar to that of second or third cuttings harvested at similar stages of maturity. However, fiber fraction digestibility from each cutting will be different, as this is influenced by ambient temperatures at the time of growth and development. Therefore, differences in fiber digestibility are not taken into account in the RFV calculation and cows may perform differently when fed forages from different cuttings.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have developed the RELATIVE FORAGE QUALITY (RFQ) index that uses fiber digestibility to estimate intake as well as the total digestible nutrients (energy) of the forage.

The RFQ index is an improvement over the RFV index for those that buy and sell forages, as it better reflects the performance that can be expected from cows fed those forages. One other advantage of this alternative index is that its predictions differentiate legumes from grasses.

The bottom line is that feeding quality forages can have a positive impact on how your cows perform. Ask your Renaissance representative for additional information. Remember the adage – "quality in=quality out." This applies to dairy cows and their entire ration program. More information will be presented on this topic in the next issue.

(edited from EXTENSION EXTRA; South Dakota Extension Service; Jeranyama and Garcia; August 2004)

Renaissance ~ The Team for Results Year-Round!

Quality preservatives and inoculants can have a positive impact on your forages at harvest and at feed-out. Get the facts and order today. Make a difference today and throughout the coming seasons.

Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or want to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Call me! My goal is to help you. That's Renaissance's commitment to you!

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RENAISSANCE...
*20 Years of Quality
Nutrition & Service!*



A Tribute ~

As we celebrate the **FOURTH OF JULY**, let each of us take time to reflect on the many blessings we enjoy day after day.

Agriculture has been a part of our economic foundation from the beginning and continues to be an important part of our nation's present... and future! Let's face the many challenges that stretch before us with renewed commitment and vigor, and work toward a brighter future for our children, grandchildren and those yet to come.



WHAT'S IT LIKE AROUND THE FARM?

What is the quality of the forage you harvest? This includes grass and alfalfa for hay or haylage, small grain crops used as a forage source, and corn, which is still a few months away from harvest! The quality of your forages will impact your herd's productivity and profitability. The timing of cutting, along with the length of cut, sharpness of the blades, dry matter content prior to baling or ensiling, and weather-related conditions will affect the end results – making milk and helping to maintain good body condition. Your herd depends on quality forages in order to produce to their genetic potential. When you combine quality forages with a balanced ration, clean water and good overall management you probably won't be disappointed! Additionally, it is beneficial to treat your baled or ensiled forages with a quality, research-tested inoculant or preservative such as KEMIN and BIOTAL products offered through Renaissance. Feed quality for results... from field to bank! Do your forages measure up? Get the facts and help to ensure your cows are eating quality forages year-round.

A POINT TO PONDER...

Life gets hectic around the farm during summer months! We seem to find ourselves almost running in circles many days, trying to accomplish everything we need to do. Hot and humid weather can plague us... as well as the cows, and we try to make the most of sunny days and rainy days alike. It is important to keep a healthy perspective when times get overly busy. Make sure you spend time enjoying family and friends throughout these summer months – and become actively involved with community activities, localized sports, family picnics and many more opportunities. You'll be surprised how things still get done!



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Keeping cool...

Keeping cool cows!

Hay, haylage & more...

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