Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Strategies to Reduce Milk Production with Limited Impacts on Future Production

University of Wisconsin Extension Dairy Program Educators (April 2020)

The current dairy market situation with reduced demand for products has caused excess product to build up at some dairy processing plants. To reduce milk supply, some dairy producers have been instructed to reduce milk shipped with some feeding excess milk to calves, heifers, and lactating cows, or disposing of milk into manure storage facilities or land spreading. However, it may be more cost effective to reduce production using the strategies presented in this factsheet. It is likely one strategy alone will not meet the needed reduction, so a combination of several strategies may be needed. Using a combination of strategies at lower intensity may also reduce negative impacts on animal health and welfare that may occur with more intense changes. To minimize impacts on future production, we suggest to selectively reduce production of mid- to late-lactation cows and avoid changes for transition and early/peak lactation cows. When considering these options, make sure to consult your veterinarian, nutritionist, cattle sales outlet, and Extension personnel to discuss available options and scenarios.

Culling Opportunities

Reducing milk shipped by culling cows should be managed carefully. Sale of cull cows should be limited to healthy, mobile animals able to be shipped. The ability to cull and sell cows also depends on the availability of buyers and meat processors. Cows with chronic high somatic cell counts or that are low producing and not pregnant after three inseminations are good candidates for culling. In the case where a cow is thin, there are not interested buyers, or processing plants are closed; producers can retain these cull cows for a period of time (30 to 60 days) to improve condition and carcass value, and allow time for processing plants to become available.

Earlier Dry Off

When considering drying cows off earlier than the farm's normal management practice, one can anticipate an average 500 pounds less milk from the lactation (assuming a 25,000 pound lactation) for every 10 days increase to the dry period. This would equate to approximately $60 less Income Over Feed Cost (IOFC) for every 10 days, when milk price is $0.15 per pound and feed cost is $0.10 per pound DM.

Reduce Milking Frequency from 3x to 2x

For dairies milking 3X, switching to 2X is an option to reduce milk production. This may result in a reduction of about eight pounds of milk per cow per day for cows switched. High producing (over 100 pounds) cows may be stressed if switched to 2x (leaking milk, discomfort, increased mastitis, and reduced lying time). Better candidates for reducing milking frequency include fresh cows, mid- to late-lactation cows, do not breed (DNBs) cows, and cows past peak production. Possible advantages of partially going to 2X is a decrease in feed intake in addition to a reduction in other costs (labor, supplies, and electricity). The UW-Madison Extension Dairy Management site (https://DairyMGT.info) has the tool **Economic Analysis of Switching from 2x to 3x Milking** (Tools -> Production) that is useful.

Diet Modifications

Changing the diet can reduce production through reduced nutrient intakes. Work with a nutritionist to formulate diets to ensure nutrient needs are met and to base changes on available forage. Increasing fiber content through greater forage content, lower quality forages, or high-fiber byproducts will lead to lower energy and feed intakes. Cornell University advises increasing aNDFom to 33-35 percent for peak production cows and 38 percent aNDFom for post-peak cows to maximize fiber intake, with other nutrients balanced to meet energy allowable milk. Decreasing fat supplements and optimizing protein will help reduce production and may be useful for post-peak cows switching to 2x milking.