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Arm & Hammer Animal Nutrition

Q&A: Focusing on Nutrition for a Smooth Transition



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Why is the prefresh feeding program so critical to cow health?

Herd performance, health, reproduction and profitability are all influenced by the prefresh diet. A good prefresh feeding program will result in better early lactation performance, reduced culling during the first 60 days in milk and improved reproductive success.

Why is a negative DCAD so critical prepartum?

By assisting the transfer of calcium from the bones to the bloodstream we can reduce the incidence of postpartum metabolic disorders. I use BIO-CHLOR® as a tool to reduce ration DCAD in close-up diets and as an “insurance policy” when forage quality is variable.

What has been your experience with feeding BIO-CHLOR in the prefresh ration?

I've been recommending BIO-CHLOR for more than five years and have seen a reduced incidence of milk fever, ketosis and

retained placentas. As a result, herds often experience significant improvements in dry matter intake (DMI) and milk production after calving.

The composition of BIO-CHLOR also helps to promote rumen function, thus better preparing the rumen and rumen bugs for the upcoming lactation.

How can producers measure cows' performance on BIO-CHLOR?

Producers can measure cows' performance by monitoring incidence of metabolic disorders and early lactation milk yield, as well as checking urine pH on close-up cows.

If a producer was interested in feeding BIO-CHLOR, what advice would you provide?

- Follow recommended feeding rates, ensuring DCAD is in the range of -8 to -15 meq/100 g ration dry matter.
- Monitor urine pH weekly with a target of 6.5. Avoid urine pH dropping below 6.0 or rising above 7.0.

How can producers ensure their transition management practices optimize pre- and postpartum performance?

A few management practices that directly impact prefresh cow performance include:

- **Cow comfort.** Reduce overcrowding, provide wider stalls and make sure pens are clean, dry and comfortable.

- **Dry matter intake.** Promote high intakes by feeding high-quality forages, pushing up feed often and having good bunk management.
- **Pen groupings.** Multiple pen moves may decrease DMI and increase stress. Especially when possible, have a separate close-up heifer group.

2009 Forage Testing Program is Just Around the Corner

The 3rd annual Arm & Hammer Forage Testing ProgramSM will begin again this spring! As with the past two years, the 2009 Forage Testing Program will provide macromineral analyses of submitted forage samples to help determine ration DCAD. Balancing ration DCAD is important for maintaining healthy, productive and profitable cows throughout all stages of lactation.

The program will launch in May and run through September. Keep an eye out for program details or visit www.AHDairy.com in May for more information.

Five Tips for Successful Transition Management



Beyond a properly formulated ration, how transition cows are managed has a direct impact on milking string performance. At the 2008 Dairy Cattle Reproduction Council conference, Dr. Ken Nordlund of the

University of Wisconsin-Madison shared five management factors that have the greatest influence on the transition.⁶

1. **Bunk space in the prefresh and fresh cow pens.** Nordlund recommends a minimum of 30 inches of bunk space per cow in the pre- and postfresh pens to optimize dry matter intake (DMI).
2. **Pen moves and social stress.** Every time a cow moves pens she must familiarize herself with the new environment, resulting in short-term decreased DMI and milk production.

Minimize pen moves during the transition period to reduce animal stress.

3. **Cow comfort.** For optimal cow comfort, Nordlund recommends 100 to 120 square feet of bedded pack or freestalls greater than 50 inches wide by nine feet long.
4. **Bedding source.** Sand as a bedding material is preferred in freestall facilities. However, any deep, loose surface bedding will be better for cows than lying on a hard or firm surface, such as a mattress.
5. **Cow monitoring.** The quality of people who care for the cows has a dramatic effect on fresh cow screening. Critical times for screening cow health should include:
 - When TMR is delivered to the feed bunk
 - As cows return to the pen after milking
 - When cows are in head lock-ups
 - During feeding, assessing appetite and attitude

Pay close attention to these five areas to ensure cows transition to the milking string smoothly and perform to their potential.