

Nutrition Adjustments for Warmer Weather

Some strange numbers are showing up this Spring in feed tests and producers need to sit down with their Agri-Basics nutritionist and ponder their impact. “If you haven’t already, get a NDF digestibility test done,” advises Virginia Ishler, nutrient management specialist and PSU Dairy Complex manager. She has seen some atypical numbers coming out of many tests. “NDF digestibility numbers are running low this year,” she says. With the coming of warmer weather and lower feed intake levels, it is vital that producers be sure their cows get the ration they need. One cause for the low NDF figures may be the number of stalky plants harvested last Fall. More stalky plants may mean lower starch levels. Those starch levels averaged across 50 farms in a Penn

State project, for example, ranged from 22-42% with an average of 33%. NDF digestibility, on average, hovered around 50% on the 30-hour test. Typically, a producer would expect that figure to run in the high 50s to low 60s. On the seven-hour starch digestibility tests, Ishler saw figures range from 57-82% of starch in samples tested last fall. The big question is what will those numbers look like this spring? Many producers will be opening another silo structure in the Spring. “It will be interesting to see how those values look,” Ishler says. If there is major variability in the feed values, the old ration will not be correct and the result could be reduced milk fat. See whether you are feeding a low starch silage that is highly digestible or a high starch silage that is highly

digestible. It makes a difference. “Think outside the box,” she says. “Look at how you are complementing your silage.” Meantime, be sure you have enough silage available to get the herd into first cutting. Coming off such a cold Winter and Spring, first cutting could be delayed by a week or more. “We can’t predict Spring moisture but both first cutting and corn planting could be delayed depending on when fields dry out,” Ishler says. Taken together, late planting and delayed first cutting will mean many producers will have to stretch what is available. If so, now would be a good time to make plans to bridge any gap in silage availability.

Nutritionists

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Producer Corner
Managing Risk

The amount of risk a producer can tolerate – like the amount of debt one can handle – varies by individual. However, it is safe to say you have too much exposure when you can’t get a good night’s sleep. Risk management tools are techniques to help you sleep better at night. They range from improving your own management practices to locking in milk prices or taking out crop insurance. While they are willing to chew the fat on milk and soybean meal prices, no Agri-Basics nutritionist will give firm predictions on soybean meal prices or milk markets. It is not their area of expertise. However, they all are positive that it will help to get good professional advice on the topic from the experts.

“Risk management is handling the probability or threat of quantifiable loss or negative occurrences caused by external or internal vulnerabilities on your farm that you can avoid by preemptive action,” says Jim Longenecker, Jr., Agri-Basics nutritional consultant located in Christiana, PA. The key concept is that you don’t simply throw your hands up in the air but you look to do something to reduce risk. “You are buying peace of mind,” says

Dan Hillyer, Agri-Basics nutritionist at Iron Rock Nutrition in Dover, PA. Today, with milk prices at \$24 per cwt, many producers are wondering why they locked in at \$18 or \$20. Hillyer’s advice: Only lock in price if you can lock in a profit. The way to do that is to look at both the price for milk and the operation’s cost of production. It sounds simple, but it is not. There are other factors involved, too, that go beyond the latest commodity reports and bank statements. Longenecker says that risk management does not have to involve outsiders and cost big bucks. While there are quick-fix vehicles the bankers like – programs like crop insurance, forward contracts – these are Band-Aid fixes, he says, not long-term cures for what ails a farm. Sit down with your accountant, veterinarian and nutritionist and identify, on paper, the vulnerabilities in your business model. “You are looking for places where you can get hammered,” Longenecker says. These usually are not your A-game areas...those where you feel comfortable and confident. They will be the C, D and E levels of your operation and are likely the ones you least like to

do. Improving those areas does not have to involve writing a check. But that kind of management will pay off. “I’d rather manage for peace of mind,” Longenecker says, emphasizing that it is not necessary to buy something to manage risk. “Improve your operation and cash in-flow rather than protecting potential income,” he says. Two groups of producers must have a risk-management strategy. The one is typically the younger, highly leveraged operator. The other is the older farmer who has fewer years of earnings to make up for a calamity.

continued middle of page 3



Money Corrected Milk Maximizes Profits

The best way to maximize profits during good economic times is to know what your cows are producing for you and plan to keep the farm’s income level well into the black. Some producers are looking to Money Corrected Milk as a tool. MCM is the hot buzzword in dairy right now. It is a metric developed to calculate a cow’s productivity based on the actual value of her milk less costs. It factors in milk

fat, milk protein, adds in any quality premiums, and subtracts out the cost of hauling, advertising and any other costs. MCM is measured in pounds of milk per cow per day. MCM adds an extra level to the traditional DHIA concept of checking production per cow. MCM takes that data a step farther and makes it easier for the producer to see just which animals are paying their way whether they are

mature cows, first-lactation cows, big fat producers, or light eaters. “It puts cows on an even playing field,” says Darvin Stoner, lab manager at Lancaster DHIA. There is no added cost for using MCM. It was added as an upgrade and is part of the DHIA’s PCDART program. “It is really neat what is built into it,” Stoner adds.

continued bottom of page 3

Getting the Most from the Pasture *by Curt Harler*

Before turning heifers and dry cows out on pasture, be sure to have a game plan ready. Sure: pasture saves space and bedding. But those animals and the pasture need watching through the Spring. Mark a few dates on the calendar to check your program as the season wears on.

Early pasture tends to be quite high in protein, very digestible and quite soluble. However, as the pasture matures, it will go downhill rapidly.

Heifers turned out on pasture will fulfill their protein needs but will likely need roughage to slow things down a bit.

Decent pasture often will have sweet clover to give it a bit of a boost. However, it is soil pH more than anything else – including fertilization -- where producers typically fall short. Check the last time you limed your pastures. At the same time, look at whether you need an updated herbicide program.

Dock and red root are constant problems in pastures. In addition, noxious and poisonous weeds continue to creep into pastures. Black nightshade,

poison hemlock and wild cherry leaves remain the three most common problems. In Southeastern Pennsylvania, poison hemlock appears to be more a problem than even nightshade.

Once animals are out on pasture, a tip offered by Wilson Eberly, Agri-Basics nutritionist based in Ephrata, is to plan to re-mow pasture to get new, fresh growth. Timing of that mowing will depend on the Spring. However, in a typical year if the heifers are turned out in mid-April, the pasture probably will be ready for a mowing at the end of May. That will produce another round of nutritional grass.

Beware of grass tetany from low magnesium on dry cows. Often producers will confuse low-magnesium tetany with milk fever, especially when it shows up in dry cows that are right at freshening. Supplement feed either with a dry cow mineral concentrate or a mineral block to assure a balanced dry cow ration. Heifers and dry cows in the middle of their dry period typically do not have tetany problems.

Of course, the way the pasture is managed will make a difference in how much feed value it produces and how long it thrives. A five-acre supplemental pasture will have a different management cycle than an operation with large grazing areas that are divided into smaller paddocks.

As long as you do not see brown spots that indicate the pasture is being grazed too low or root mass is being trampled, the pasture will thrive. Eventually, for six or eight weeks in summer, any pasture will shut down. At that point, the cows definitely will need supplemental feed.

A health issue to keep in mind is worms. “Parasites and pastures go hand-in-hand,” Eberly says. A two-part program is effective. Give the first dose at the beginning of the season and the second two to three weeks later. For full-season pasture programs, another deworming in late summer will prove its worth.

A final consideration is fly control. For more on that, see the next article **Tune Up Fly Control.**

Tune Up Fly Control

It is easier to keep fly populations down from the get-go than it is to knock down a full-scale invasion of flies. A dairy’s fly strategy should reflect that.

“Get in early with fly control and don’t take it out too soon,” says Dan Hillyer, Agri-Basics nutritionist at Iron Rock Nutrition in Dover, PA.

A solid, basic program should start 30 days before the beginning of fly season and continue for 30 days after. ClariFly and Rabon both are excellent materials for fly control. Ear tags will work, too.

“Fly control should definitely be used in calf and heifer feed,” Hillyer continues. “It can be used in milking cow rations depending on the facilities and your needs.”

Rabon can be fed free-choice to cows. It is an oral larvicide that kills face flies, house flies and stable flies in the larval stage before they can do any damage. It moves through the cow’s digestive system and into the manure where it kills maggots on contact after eggs hatch. It also is approved for beef and horses.

ClariFly can be supplemented to heifers on pasture and will do an

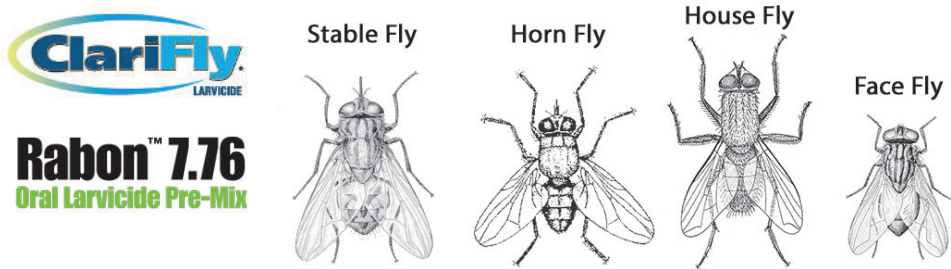
excellent job of controlling flies. Unlike conventional insecticides that attack the nervous system of insects, diflubenzeron interrupts the fly’s life cycle (it targets chitin production), rather than via toxicity. Feed ClariFly at 0.10 mg per kg of bodyweight per day. Your nutritionist will help work out the exact rate. Keep in mind that, while intake by any particular cow will vary, fly control will not be affected.

A program of Rabon or ClariFly should begin early enough in Spring before flies appear and continue through Summer until cold weather ends fly activity, reminds Wilson Eberly, Agri-

Basics nutritionist in Ephrata.

For producers putting dry cows or heifers on pasture, ear tag treatments are worth consideration. Easy to use, the tags will protect the heifers as they go outside. Blocks are appropriate, too, Hillyer says. Blocks are a good alternative for animals that are not getting grain on a daily basis.

Stick to label rates. Doubling the amount of material does not increase its effectiveness and just costs more money. Halving the rate will come back to bite you in the milk check since the material is very dose-dependent to keep larvae from hatching.



Meet Dale Miller



Please help us welcome Dale Miller, Agri-Basics new Coordinator of Sales and Marketing.

Dale joined Agri-Basics in February. His familiarity with Agri-Basics goes back almost two decades as he has worked with AB nutritionists in various ways.

Dale grew up on a dairy farm in Gap, PA. He comes to Agri-Basics with broad experience in the cattle industry. This includes jobs with Frank Kurt(Portable

Custom Grinder-mixer), White Horse; as a Sales/Marketing Manager with Zook Molasses Inc. in Honey Brook; as North East & International Sales Manager for NutriAd; and most recently as North East U.S. Territory Manager for AgriLabs.

With AB, Dale’s role will be completely devoted to support of The Agri-Basics 15 nutritionists. Reach him at the Elizabethtown Office on X-101.

Managing Risk *continued from top of page 1*

“Producers who are highly leveraged will want to protect against risk and lock in profits,” Hillyer says. “That’s a good risk management strategy.”

For some reason, it seems beef and hog operators are better at forward contracting – perhaps because they go to market only a couple of times a year and do not want to be exposed to market extremes where dairymen sell milk daily.

Mike Campbell, Agri-Basics nutritionist from State College notes that the dairy industry tends to follow a three-year pattern. “At least since the early 2000’s we’ve faced tough times every third year,” he says. “If it’s not because of low milk prices, it’s because of high input costs. It’s followed this cycle time and again. The potential is there that next

year could be a tough year.”

Campbell would advise producers to look at put options while prices are still good. “The best time to do it is when milk prices are high.”

A put option basically locks in a floor under what prices a producer might get for milk. If prices remain above that floor, the producer enjoys the higher prices. However, if milk prices go below the floor, the dairy is secured on the base price given by the put option.

Hillyer notes that some producers feel there is more money to be made on the upside than what they might lose on the downside by locking in. The question a producer has to ask is how much pain he is willing to tolerate if the market falls and how much the farm’s checkbook can

handle should markets go South.

“Work with your advisor team to build a positive risk-management plan for milk flow, animal health and crop production,” Longenecker says. Keep in mind that risk is the probability of something happening multiplied by the resulting cost or benefit if it does occur. To improve the odds of that being on the positive side, look at what you can control in your own farm, what you can change in the way you work, and other factors you can improve inside your own operation.

These strategies, all agree, offer a long-term roadmap that will help you manage risk for the current season and many seasons to come.

Money Corrected Milk Maximizes Profit *continued from bottom of page 1*

MCM can be utilized as part of a nutrition program to evaluate the value of components, points out Robert Davis, Agri-Basics nutritionist in Christiana. “Say a herd has 4.0 butterfat and wants to know if it would be more profitable to go for more milk at 3.7 butterfat,” he suggests. Using MCM would show a corrected apples-to-apples analysis versus simply looking at the cwt of milk in the bulk tank.

Some producers have toyed with fat-corrected milk or energy-corrected milk to enhance their DHIA figures. But those metrics still are a step removed from the economics that drive every farm. MCM gives those numbers.

A cow producing at 2.8 fat is putting a lot more water into the bulk tank than one producing at the herd’s average of,

say 3.6. Her MCM might be 120 versus 160 for the herd, even if her daily milk-only production is higher than the herd average.

Producers can use MCM as a tool for culling cows. Typically, a producer will mark cows set for culling in PCDART. “The program will show income over feed cost,” Stoner says. Take a herd with an average 3.5 butterfat and 3.0 protein. A 400-day cow making 50 pounds of milk with 4.3 fat and 3.3 protein is actually out-producing the nominal 50 pounds in the bulk tank since, with protein at \$4.19 a pound, she is making the operation more money.

The MCM feature on PCDART allows a producer to correct for first, second or third lactations or the stage of lactation. It can calculate production based on

bodyweight, assuming a first lactation cow is at 1210 pounds and a second lactation cow is at 1460. It considers the differing feed intake. Stoner notes that a first-lactation cow at 33 days probably is eating 35 to 40 pounds of feed as her rumen gets going. That is less than a mature cow who probably consumes 50 pounds of feed daily.

Stoner says about a quarter of DHIA producers are using MCM and that he gets regular calls from producers who want more information.

The term “Money Corrected Milk” is a trademark (just as Kleenex is for tissues) owned by G&R Dairy Consulting, Inc., in Virginia.

It would be worthwhile for anyone on PCDART to explore the MCM feature with their Agri-Basics nutritionist.