

CENTRAL NEW YORK DAIRY NEWS



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by Dave Balbian

Feeding Your Cows in Crisis Mode

Your Cows Never Studied Economics. They really don't care what the price of milk is or what grain costs. They are reacting to what they are fed and how they are cared for and managed. Their requirements for milk production, growth, maintenance, pregnancy, and exercise have not changed. For most dairy farms, actually shortchanging the cows on basic nutritional needs will cost more than it saves. For every dollar saved you will likely see a loss of two to three dollars. It is a sad state of affairs. You're losing money, but cutting back on grain (**assuming you are not overfeeding to begin with**) will cause you to lose even more!

There is No Free Lunch. Everything your cows consume is accounted for in one way or another. They milk more or less, they lose or gain weight, they grow or don't grow, they cycle to be able to reproduce or not, and they carry a pregnancy or not. As far as your cows are concerned, it comes down to a situation that reminds me of that old oil filter commercial that used to say, "You can pay me now or you can pay me later." We have bred dairy cows to produce high levels of milk. Genetically they want to produce. If they are shortchanged a number of things will happen. They will lose weight by drawing on body reserves. That will only go so far. Milk production will go down. If they are not bred it will be more difficult to get them pregnant. They may stop cycling and getting them pregnant (in the short run) will be impossible. When more favorable economic conditions occur, cows that are way down in milk because of a low nutritional ration will not respond very well when nutrition levels are increased. For most of them, it will take a new calving to really get them going again.

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Forage Quality is King. You've all heard this one a hundred times over the years. It's times like these that it really hits home. It's not just hype. Forage quality does really pay off in higher production & lower grain costs. There are real herds feeding diets consisting of 65% plus forage (on a dry matter basis) achieving 80 to 90 lbs./cow/day production levels.

With all the rain we're gotten it has been difficult to get hay crops harvested in a timely fashion. Some people got early 1st cutting harvested in May and were even able to sneak in the 2nd cutting in mid June. That's great stuff. However, much of the hay crop this year will not be the best. Watch for opportunities the rest of this season to harvest high quality 2nd or 3rd cutting that you can segregate for the milk cows. Grazing herds have had the weather to keep pastures going. The forage quality from intensive grazing can't be beat, which really helps during these times. Although in some cases mud has been troublesome where laneways & barnyards have not been improved from native soil. The corn crop?? Time will tell.

Take Care of the Basics First: Much of the fluff has been taken out of dairy rations months ago. The items that may help this or that, but we're not always sure about, have been deleted from most formulas. **Be sure the basics of energy and protein are in balance.** If you have been forced to feed less than an optimal ration because you can't get credit, be sure you're doing the best you can to have protein & energy in balance to support whatever level of production you are targeting. Some basic forage testing still pays off to get the ration right.

If you're grazing and/or feeding some type of hay crop (assuming it has reasonable protein levels) your first limiting factor is probably energy. Corn grain is still the most economical source for most people. Even though well managed pasture can be high in energy, it is deficient in carbohydrates and corn can fill that need. It doesn't have to be all corn, but for most people corn is still the most economical source. If corn grain will be limited and some corn silage is available, it can partially fill the need. Corn silage is normally about 50% grain.

If your forage is mostly corn silage and lower protein hay crop, your first limiting nutrient is probably protein. In this case a high protein ingredient (like soybean meal) will initially give you the most bang for your buck. A touch of feed grade urea can be very economical (assuming it fits the ration needs).

Don't forget that your cows have a sodium and chloride requirement. Around 3 ounces of trace mineral salt is a general minimum per head per day. A free choice salt block is not a bad idea for higher producers needing more. Also, don't forget a basic mineral mix. It's makeup will depend on the forages fed.

Get Them Bred on Time: This is so very important right now, especially if you're in a situation where production is down. It used to be that daily losses per cow per day after 100 days open were \$2, then \$5, and now you're hearing \$8! A low producing cow that is open is simply a drain on your operation, destined to cost you plenty in feed and nothing in milk income with a long dry period.

Cow Comfort: This is a bigger issue than most people realize. Good ventilation, comfortable stalls, minimal or no overcrowding, access to unlimited clean water, adequate lighting, clean & smooth feed bunks, adequate feedbunk space, and feed available most all the time are all important. Comfortable cows eat more, and cows that eat more produce more milk. An extra pound of feed dry matter (assuming it all went to milk) is worth between 2 and 3 pounds of milk, depending on what it is & how it is being fed.

NY Center for Dairy Excellence -Dairy Profit Teams

The NY Center for Dairy Excellence is providing funding for up to 45 Dairy Profit Teams across NY State. The program provides \$2,400 per farm to assist dairy farms with setting up a management team of consultants to help with operational analysis, decision making and strategic planning on the farm. You can learn more about the program and get an application at the following website: <http://www.nycde.org/?PageID=3053>. You can also call (315) 853-3823 or email Mark Kenville at mkenville@nyfvi.org for more information.

Composting Dead Livestock

Tired of paying someone to take away dead livestock? Learn how to compost them at: <http://compost.css.cornell.edu/naturalrenderingFS.pdf>

If you do not have access to the internet call me at (518) 762-3909 Ext:110, give me your name & mailing address, and I will mail the information to you.

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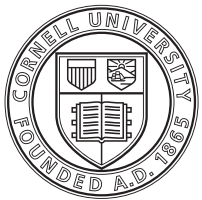
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