Dealing with quota constraints and fluctuations in milk demand

FALL IS ALWAYS A busy time of year. There is corn silage to harvest, beans to come off, winter wheat to be planted and usually on top of everything else, more cows calving because of fall incentives.

The challenge is: incentive days are not a guarantee. As much as farms try to prepare for this expected rise in milk demand, it is impossible to have a fail-proof plan coming into the fall because undoubtedly market demand will change.

One added incentive day in a 30-day month is the equivalent of an additional 3.3% quota. Therefore, with unplanned additions or removals of incentive days, a farm's production has to remain fluid.

Strategies when dealing with incentives and quota constraints:

Milk Replacer Vs. Whole Milk

Too much milk: use saleable whole milk to feed your heifer calves.

Not enough milk: use milk replacer to feed your heifers instead of saleable milk. For an average 100 cow milking dairy, this could mean an extra 80L in the bulk tank each day.

Palm Fat

Too much milk: removing palm fat will drop butterfat (BF) and thus reduce your kilograms of fat shipped. If you have too much milk and have palm fat added, removing the palm fat can help reduce costs when you are already over shipping milk.

Not enough milk: adding palm fat to your ration at an inclusion rate of around 200-300 g/cow/day should optimize an increase in butterfat. A higher butterfat, when volume remains the same, will allow you to ship more kilograms of butterfat per day.

The addition of palm fat should increase butterfat by 0.1-0.25 percentage points. A 3.9% BF should increase to 4.0-4.15%. If you choose to feed palm fat you generally need to get a 0.15 point increase in butterfat to be profitable.

Please remember that not all palm fat products are equal. To get a profitable increase in butterfat you will need a product that has >85% palm fats.

It is always important to ensure that the overall fat in the ration does not exceed 5.5%. A diet high in fat can significantly impact rumen health and function.

Dry Period

Too much milk: ensure you are targeting a 60-day dry period for all animals.

Not enough milk: can shorten the dry period for mature animals to a minimum of 46 days. DO NOT shorten the dry period to less than 45 days, as this has been proven to reduce milk production in the subsequent lactation.

Culling Cattle

Too much milk: this is a perfect opportunity to cull low production or 'problem' cows from your herd. Assess your animals in terms of production, somatic cell count, pregnancy status, feet and legs, etc.

Reminder:

If you have too much milk and no under credits to fill, it may be tempting to try and cool the ration down.

Although cost savings can be had by pulling out some supplement or protein, significantly changing the protein and energy composition of your ration for cost savings can have negative consequences for a fresh cows entire lactation. Remember, lowering peak milk yield will lower a cow's total milk yield for her entire lactation.

Although it may be easy to slow down milk production, the switch does not work the other way and you will not be able to easily ramp up milk production again until you have new fresh cows entering the milking herd.

Please Note:

At August 2022 your under credit limit will be reduced from a maximum of 30 days to a new maximum of 15 days under.

This is 10 months away. Therefore, if you currently have over 15 days of under credits you have the next 10 months to fill them or else they will be taken away. This would be a significant loss to your income potential. Some of the strategies listed above can be used to help you fill this quota.

If you have questions about how to deal with managing your milk production please do not hesitate to talk to your herd veterinarian. D

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