

Texas Dairy Matters

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FEEDING MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO DECREASE AFFECTS OF HEAT STRESS

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The heat of the summer months affects dairy cows throughout Texas. There are ways to combat heat stress, including the use of shade structures, fans, and sprinklers. Although preparing facilities is extremely important in battling summer heat, changing the feeding program can decrease the negative effects of heat stress.

Water, the most important nutrient, is crucial for cows under heat stress. Make sure cows have access to an unlimited supply of clean water. Chilled water can also assist in cooling hot cows.

Decreases in dry matter intake can hurt milk production and cow health. Focus on maintaining intake levels as much as possible, but plan to adjust rations to offset declining intakes.

Numerous ration adjustments can be made to offset declines in intake caused by the summer heat. Potential nutritional strategies include:

- Add buffers to the diet,
- Decrease NDF and ADF levels to reduce heat generation during fiber digestion,
- Balance rumen-degradable protein,
- Add buffers to the diet,
- Increase dietary sodium and potassium concentrations, or
- Increase concentrations of other minerals to offset the declines in intake.



Adding niacin or yeast culture has been beneficial in some cases.

If currently feeding a one-group TMR, consider making a change and feeding different rations to high producing cows. Decreases in dry matter intake can cause serious consequences for these cows, including metabolic problems and reduced lactation peaks that will hurt milk production for the rest of the lactation. Formulating diets specific for these cows helps address their needs without increasing feed costs for the entire herd.

In summary, practical feeding tips during the summer months include:

- Provide cows plenty of access to clean water.
- Keep feeds bunks clean and free of spoiled feed.
- Maintain a fresh supply of feed at all times.
- Adjust ration composition as appropriate.

Paying special attention to the feeding program during the summer months can improve cow health and prevent decreases in milk production. A sound nutritional program, in combination with other heat-abatement strategies, helps take the burn out of the summer heat.