

# Texas Dairy Matters

*Higher Education Supporting the Industry*

---

## FEED MANAGEMENT FOR TRANSITION COWS

Ellen Jordan, Ralph Bruno, Kevin Lager, and Todd Bilby  
Extension Dairy Team  
Department of Animal Science  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
The Texas A&M University System

The transition period, from three weeks before to three weeks after calving, sets the stage for a successful lactation. Take time to evaluate your system by evaluating your feed management program for transition cows.

Score your management from one to five in the following areas with a five for always to a one for never.

1. Provide cooling for cows in the dry period as well as the lactating herd. Provide shade in the dry cow pens. Keep calving area clean and dry.
2. Separate heifers from older cows. Older cows dominate heifers, reducing heifer dry matter intake. During the close-up period, mature Holsteins should consume over 26 pounds of dry matter intake per day while heifers should consume over 23 pounds per day. After calving, mature Holsteins (second and later lactation) should consume at least 43 pounds of dry matter intake per day, while first lactation animals should be over 35 pounds per day.
3. Provide a minimum of 30 inches of bunk space per cow in the close-up pen. Stanchions reduce how often dominant cows displace lower ranked cows. Minimize time spent with cows locked in stanchions, particularly for transition cows.



4. Monitor feed intake for close-up and recently fresh cows. Weigh feed delivered to close-up and fresh cows daily, as well as the feed refusals. Use a particle size separator to evaluate whether the cows sort feed by comparing the particle size of fresh feed to the refusals.
5. Feed high quality, palatable hay and silage. Do not feed the top or sides of silage piles to cows since they usually have more mold. Molds or mycotoxins reduce dry matter intake.
6. Clean out feed bunks daily for close-up and fresh cows. Molds grow in feed refusals much more rapidly when temperatures are higher, reducing palatability.



7. Monitor fresh cow culling. Strive for less than 5% culled and 2% death loss during the first 60 days after calving.

8. Insure that all cows and heifers have an abundant supply of clean, palatable water available continuously.

Total the points for each management practice and then rate your performance using the following scale:

- > 40 = Excellent
- 30-40 = Good
- 20-29 = Fair
- < 20 = Needs Change

Although this list is not all inclusive, improving management in these key areas can help cows successfully transition into lactation. Use your score on individual items to identify where to begin.