

## Vet's Corner: Close-Up Dry Cow Pen Surge

At many farms, there are fewer calvings in May and June, followed by a surge of calvings in mature cows in July and August. This phenomenon occurs as a consequence of lower fertility in the previous late summer and fall due to heat stress in the mature cows. There is a catch up period of settling cows in late fall which results in many older cows calving in the following summer. Since most close up group pens are sized for the AVERAGE number of animals that calve in a three week time period, it means that one half of the time the pen is crowded and the pen is under populated for the other half. If the farm is faced with an over population of the close up pen during the next few months, so special strategies should be employed:

1. The Close Up pen capacity should be determined by the proper length of feed bunk, which is 30 inches per cow, and not by the number of stalls. During surges of springing cows it is permitted to allow cows to enter the group under 3 weeks before calving; so if due dates are accurately recorded ,cows can enter the Close-Up pen as late as ten days before the due date.
2. Intensify bedding changes, water tank cleaning, and number of feedings per day to compensate for overcrowding.
3. Double check that adequate air changes occur in hot weather with overcrowded, over conditioned mature close-up cows.

Heifers really take a beating when mixed with a lot of mature dry cows. On the average sized Northeast dairy farm, there are not sufficient numbers to justify separate springing cow and heifer groups, so they must be commingled. If they are mixed, it is considered best to introduce heifers to the herd in the far-off dry pen, allowing them a few months to acclimate. Mixing heifers with mature cows for the first time immediately after calving is considered to be a very high risk practice, and mixing them for the first time in an overcrowded close up pen is also considered to present risk to the heifers.

To reduce social stress from reestablishing pecking order in an overcrowded close up pen, consider planning the pen move from far off to close up on a weekly basis instead every day or a few times a week. Steps to reduce these moves will result in improved transition performance.

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