Vet's Corner: Care of the Transition Cow is the Key to top Reproductive Performance

An exciting challenge at the W. H. Miner Institute farm this month was to discuss reproductive management and care of the transition cow with a group of Japanese agricultural visitors. (It is a unique challenge to one's ability to concentrate and carry a thought, while giving a talk one sentence at a time with pauses for interpretation.) From the Q and A period it was evident that certain topics about dairy cow management are common on a world wide basis.

The basis of getting the cow bred back starts with transitional cow management. This year, many Northeast dairy farms are entering the season of heat stress carrying too many over conditioned dry cows. The summer of '05 was the worst breeding season in our 30+ year Veterinary career due to unrelenting heat stress which has resulted in the backlog of these over conditioned dry cows. Farm managers should focus on these basic goals to get through this upcoming challenge.

1. **Maintain Normocalcemia**. To prevent clinical milk fever cases and subclinical hypocalcemia which leads to Metritis and Displaced Abomasum, review dry cow rations to be sure that DCAD is low and K content is below 1.5% DM.
2. **Adapt Rumen to high energy diet**. From far-off dry cow to high production groups, no change in NEl greater that 10% can be allowed. So energy content of the ration must be stepped up to the transition cow in a gradual manner. Provide fresh feed twice daily and don't allow less that 2.5 feet bunkspace for each transition cow.
3. **Strengthen the Immune System**. Review dry cow vaccination protocol with the herd health Veterinarian and monitor the farm staff to be certain that all respiratory, mastitis, and calf scour vaccines are being given. Also review ration to be certain that adequate Se and Vit E are fed to head off Retained Placenta problems.
4. **Maintain Body Condition Score**. The goal for BCS for cows to dry off is 3.0-3.25. Eyeball the late lactation cows and consider creating a special group for cows with BCS over 3.5. To prevent ketosis and fat liver syndrome, dry cows should be fed to gain 0.25-0.5 BCS during the dry period. If they start the dry period with BCS over 3.5, they can freshen with a BCS of 4.0 or greater, which will lead to off feed problems and start the cascade of metabolic disease in the fresh cow.
5. **Provide proper maternity pen management**. Review signs of labor and proper pen observation times with all staff expected to calve cows.

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