

Housing, Vaccinations, Parasites and Other Dry Cow Problems: Southern States

Howard Acree, D.V.M.
P.O. Box 6775
Jacksonville, Florida 32205

I would like to tell you something about my practice area. In the five-county area which we cover, there are about 60 dairies, ranging in size from 100 to 10,000 cows (the average having 300 to 400 cows). We are responsible for about 10,000 of these cows. My brother, who is also a veterinarian, is in practice with me. We have an 800-cow dairy which he manages while I manage the practice. This arrangement has helped us tremendously because it has convinced us and our clients that a dairy manager cannot run a dairy and keep up with the changes in veterinary medicine. We know that a veterinarian is a valuable member of the dairy management team.

The greatest cause of health problems in our area is high temperature, high humidity, and high water. When I say high water, I mean deep mud. I have seen charts that combine temperature and wind velocity to arrive at a chill factor. I wish someone would chart a heat factor from temperature and humidity. We can have 80° weather with 80-90% humidity and the cows will hunt any kind of shade, even a fence post, and stand or lie breathing heavily with tongues hanging out. Our worst months are June through September or October. Average daytime temperature is over 90° and 80% relative humidity. We have more than 70 days during these months with temperatures over 90°. At the same time we have over 63% of our annual rainfall which is over 54 inches.

Housing

In my area all dry cows are either on pasture or dry lots at all times. We have no free stalls. When cows are dried up they are turned into pastures close to the barn. As they start to spring up they are separated into a smaller lot closer to the barn. The cows freshen in this springer lot or pasture. We have tried freshening stalls, but this doesn't seem to work too well for us. Wide open spaces for cows and calves seem to keep them healthier. In the summer dry cows are fed from three times a week to once a day, depending on pasture. The only housing is a shed or trees. Movable shade is best because stationary sheds get awfully muddy. In the winter, which is January and February, sometimes March, the cows have to brave the cold and hope for sunshine. We only have an average of 12 days a year of 32° or lower.

Vaccination

At the time cows are turned dry we vaccinate for leptopomona, a mixed bacterin containing coliform,

salmonella and pasteurilla. In some herds we also use a staph autogenous bacterin. In some herds we vaccinate for IBR, BVD, and PI₃ at this time. I know that this should not be done but we usually get away with it. The owner is advised that the label says "don't do it," but we leave the decision to him. If it is not done at this time we do vaccinate when the cow freshens. We prefer to do this when the cow is dry because our object is to freshen a cow with all the protection she can get. She is under severe stress when she freshens. When the springers are separated from the dry cows, they are revaccinated with mixed bacterin. This is primarily for the herd that raises calves. We are firm believers in feeding colostrum within 15 to 30 minutes after calving. After a calf is born you can give it blood serums, vaccines, antibiotics or whatever—nothing takes the place of colostrum. Most of the dairies in our area buy replacement heifers instead of raising their own. We treat these replacements as springers and vaccinate them as we would our dry cows.

Worming

We have only recently recommended worming dry cows. We divided our own herd in half, treating one half and using the other half as controls. The treated cows milked more than enough to pay for the treatment.

Mastitis

All of my regular clients use a dry cow treatment. Two things are important here: No 1. Be sure cow is completely dry before treating, No. 2. Don't dry up a cow with clinical mastitis. We continuously stress these points to our clients. As cows spring up, we culture the quarters and treat infections as needed. Here again we are trying to freshen the cow with all the protection we can give her. Dairies make money freshening cows that are ready to milk.