

Ways to Increase Milk Production

Pete Erickson, UNH Professor of Dairy Management and Extension Dairy Specialist

Dairy farmers probably get sick of hearing the age-old advice of “you’ve got to increase production to be more profitable”. However, there isn’t a much better way to increase returns than to get more out of fixed resources. By focusing on managerial practices and keeping an eye on details, production can increase without spending a lot of variable expenses (ie. feed and supplies). Once the basic costs of animal facilities, taxes, insurance, supplies, etc. are met, increasing production per cow is the “gravy”.

Below are some things to consider for increasing milk production:

Water

- a. Provide clean water continuously with an adequate flow rate
- b. Provide enough water space for your cows- 1 water fountain/20 cows or 4 inches of linear space/cow
- c. Develop a routine for cleaning waterers at least weekly

Feed

- a. Provide 2 feet of linear bunk space/cow (unless a robotic dairy)
- b. Do not let feed bunks go empty
- c. Push feed up at least six times/day
- d. Remove old feed daily
- e. Feed a balanced diet
- f. If on pasture, rotate and supplement as necessary
- g. Scrape off and discard spoiled silage in the silo before feeding
- h. Test feeds regularly for nutrient analyses



Cow Comfort

- a. Provide each cow with her own stall
- b. Make sure stalls have ample bedding
- c. Make sure stalls are comfortable - look for cows perching (indicative of uncomfortable cows)
- d. Clean bedding from stalls weekly or as needed
- e. Trim feet at least an average of 1.5 times/year
- f. Treat all cows with sore feet
- g. Provide secure footing in all walkways
- h. Supply adequate airflow for proper ventilation (heat abatement)
- i. Avoid drafts and storm penetration in the winter

Milking Procedure

- a. When moving cows - be calm – no yelling or hitting the cows
- b. Milk at either 8-hour or 12-hour intervals



Photo courtesy of Drew Conroy

- c. Consider milking fresh cows (<21 d) twice (beginning and end of milking) –this is equivalent to milking 3X/day for an entire lactation.
- d. Do not allow cows to stand in holding area for an extended period
- e. Fore-strip and provide pre-milking udder stimulation
- f. From the time of manual stimulation to application of the machine should take no more than 120 seconds
- g. Wear clean, disposable gloves
- h. Do not machine strip
- i. Cows should take 4-7 minutes to milk out
- j. Post dip
- k. Return cows directly to feed to avoid lying down after milking

Dry cows

- a. Abruptly stop milking to dry off
- b. Remove cow from proximity to milking cows
- c. Allow more space and wider stalls for dry cows
- d. Dry-treat all cows
- e. Feed a far-off diet
- f. Feed a close-up diet
- g. Provide fans during the Summer

Reproduction

- a. Check and record all observable heats
- b. Breed after 50 day volunteer waiting period (VWP)
- c. Make sure insemination techniques are reviewed and updated
- d. Use heat detection devices (markers, chalking the tail head, etc.)
- e. Use synchronization techniques if needed
- f. Consider using blood testing services to confirm pregnancies

General Health

- a. Vaccinate cows and heifers as necessary
- b. Check for internal parasites and regularly deworm if on pasture
- c. Establish a working relationship with a veterinarian
- d. Schedule regular herd health checks
- e. Consider using photoperiod (16 hours of light-8 hours of darkness)
- f. Use diagnostic lab services for disease problems
- g. Utilize hardware-detection magnets on feed wagon chutes
- h. Groove slippery floors
- i. Provide restraint facilities for administering health procedures
- j. Feed only good quality colostrum (> 50 g/L IgG or > 22% Brix)
- k. Use an iodine navel dip on all calves after birth



About the Author

Dr. Pete Erickson is Professor of Dairy Management and Extension Dairy Specialist at the University of New Hampshire. His primary research area is in the area of optimal colostrum production and management through feeding of the prepartum cow and the newborn calf. He also works in the area of calf and heifer nutrition along with the feeding of alternative feedstuffs.

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