

# North Star Veterinary Services – Monthly Newsletter May 2020

As we all adjust to a “new normal” during this strange time, our industry is also faced with extreme challenges. We know that times are tough, and are so appreciative for your unwavering hard work and also for the positivity that you bring to each day. In this month’s newsletter we will discuss some thoughts for dairy farms moving forward. There isn’t one perfect answer on how to address the challenges you will face in the coming months. It will take adaptability and resilience to succeed, which I know you all have. The following are just a few ideas on how to move forward with reductions in milk production required by co-ops and decreased milk prices. Know that we are here to help you navigate any questions that you may have, and are thinking about these challenges too. Please let us know what we can do to help.

1. Decreasing milk production and cutting costs will likely come from several different strategies. Be open to creative solutions. In order to stay focused and not get overwhelmed, it helps to start by thinking of your end goal.
  - a. Look at your average daily milk production and average daily milk shipped, and calculate what your production goal will be with the expected percent reduction.
  - b. Acknowledge that there are down sides to many of the changes you may need to implement, but at this time the economic result may out way the negative side effects.
  - c. The same solutions will not work on every farm. Just because your neighbor is doing it, doesn’t mean it is the right choice for your farm.
  
2. Strategic culling
  - a. Now more than ever, it will be important to choose wisely which cows are staying in and leaving the herd. Although cull dairy prices may be low, remember that holding onto non-productive animals is expensive.
  - b. Dry off DNB cows. These are animals you already plan on not being part of your herd’s future. When possible, cull these animals.
  - c. Identify low value cows such as cows with multiple disease events.
    - i. Cows to cull: high somatic cell count, multiple cases of mastitis, multiple lameness episodes, chronic lameness, difficult breeders
  - d. We can help with these decisions. Please let us know if you need help evaluating your herd records in order to determine which cows should leave. Again, these decisions are farm specific and it is important to keep your farm’s future goals in mind when making them.
  
3. Feeding whole milk to calves
  - a. Dumping milk is not something anyone wants to do. Feeding this milk to calves is an excellent alternative to putting it down the drain. If you currently feed waste milk to calves, whole milk will be of much higher quality and consistency. If you currently feed milk replacer to calves, switching to feeding whole milk temporarily will result in huge cost savings.
  - b. Whole milk is an excellent source of nutrition for calves and does not need any additives. Feeding good quality whole milk from your milking cows is not the same as feeding waste milk or treated milk. Waste milk is typically low quality and variable, while whole milk that we are talking about is much more consistent in its components and nutritional plane.

- c. The downside to feeding whole milk is that there is an increased risk of transmission of certain diseases such as Mycoplasma, Salmonella, and Johne's Disease, especially if you are switching from milk replacer to whole milk. You may consider purchasing a pasteurizer to decrease this risk. We are happy to help you assess the specific risk of doing this on your farm.
  - d. Remember that feeding whole milk will likely increase growth rate in your calves. This may change your weaning timeline.
  - e. Switching to feeding whole milk will need careful consideration about storage, handling, heating, and feeding of milk. We are also happy to discuss these considerations with you.
4. Extending dry period 7-10 days can help decrease the overall number of milking cows in the herd at once.
    - a. Do not allow your dry period to extend beyond 70 days or you will see an increase in metabolic and transition cow issues in early lactation.
  5. Feeding cows for lower production
    - a. This may be an option for some herds, but you should work closely with your nutritionist to make these changes.
  6. 3x to 2x milking
    - a. For some farms, switching from 3x to 2x on some groups of animals could help decrease overall production.
    - b. If you do this, focus on doing so in fresh cows up to 21 days in milk and later lactation cows over 150 days in milk. Doing so with high production animals without adjusting their ration could result in a higher risk for mastitis cases.
    - c. Experts predict that this strategy will result in the longest lag in returning to normal production once the reduction requirements are no longer in place. For this reason, it is not recommended the first choice in how to proceed, but may be an option for some farms.
  7. Focus on healthy cows
    - a. Although we may be looking to reduce milk production, we still want to ensure cows are still healthy. This means maintaining a good plane of nutrition and not cutting out preventative health measures such as regular vaccinations. Not only will it ensure a future for your herd, but it will help avoid big disasters now in especially challenging times.

As always, let us know what we can do to help you. Thank you for the hard work you do everyday. Stay healthy, and remember there are good things on the other side of all this.

#### North Star Updates

- We are continuing with all routine and emergency veterinary care to dairy farms. We are wearing masks at all times, and ask that you do also anytime that we are unable to maintain 6 feet of distance between us.
- Routine Johne's testing is currently not being performed at the diagnostic lab we use. Cows showing signs of Johne's can still be tested.