



Pfizer Animal Health

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Remain Vigilant When Assessing Feed and Vaccination Protocols

In tough economic times don't do anything that harms production

By Jerry Olson, DVM, MS, Pfizer Animal Health

NEW YORK (June 22, 2009) — Producers can't change the price of milk, but they can examine ways to make their operations more efficient in good times or bad. When dairies are making money, it is easy to forget the details, but in tough times, reexamining current feed and vaccination protocols can ensure maximum production.

With all the possible feed and vaccine changes, producers should never fall to the temptation of doing something drastic. Producers might think that if they feed a less expensive ingredient or cut certain areas of their vaccination protocol, they're saving money—but they also might do some serious damage to milk production.

Cost Savings Opportunities

On most dairies, feed constitutes the single biggest cost producers face. Examining current feed protocols may potentially increase efficiency. Overfeeding is a serious problem, and producers should really make sure that feed is not unnecessarily wasted. Reviewing the current daily total mixed ration (TMR) to determine if it is being built meticulously with everything measured out could prove beneficial. If producers can save even a tenth of a point with a little fine tuning, they can save some money.

Working to feed for fewer refusals is another way to cut on wastes and save money. Most producers feed for a 5 percent refusal rate. Can they work to take that down to a 1 percent refusal rate?

Examining cows on an individual basis and keeping in mind what stage of lactation they are in also can help ensure precise feeding. Cows further out in lactation may not need as much protein in the ration because they are producing less milk, so those rations become less expensive per pound of dry matter. It may be better to target milking herds with multiple, precise rations, rather than one ration fits all.

Be careful in making decisions like cutting trace mineral and vitamin packs. The effect of cutting trace mineral and vitamin packs may not have immediate effects but may compromise health of cows in the future. It is appropriate to review the formulation of trace mineral and vitamin supplement packs but don't be penny wise and dollar foolish. I have seen producers try to get by with just hay and corn silage. That's guaranteed less milk.

Vaccination Protocols

Reexamining the current vaccine protocol is never a bad idea. The latest vaccines provide both the thorough protection and scheduling convenience that successful producers need, easing labor costs and enhancing management decisions.

Remember, animal health costs account for less than 5 percent of producer's expenses so there is not a lot gained by cutting back in this area. Potentially, a producer could get away with not vaccinating but the repercussions could be devastating if BVD or Lepto hardjo-bovis entered the herd. Vaccines help ensure a cow's health and can actually reduce the costs of producing milk.

Given the importance of animal health on production, it only makes sense to cover everything by helping prevent harmful diseases through regular vaccination. Any change will become a very expensive decision if it lowers milk production or harms the health of the animal. Producers should remain vigilant and speak with a nutritionist and veterinarian before making any changes to existing protocols.

The Pfizer Animal Health Dairy Wellness Plan is a 365-day approach to managing your dairy operation that focuses on the health of the dairy animal, the economic health of the dairy and the proper use of animal health products leading to a safe and healthy food supply.

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