

How can you make the most of your winter

The P&L team understand the pressure decreasing milk price has put on dairy enterprises in the last 12 months. With little change in milk price expected in the next 6 months, this will undoubtedly put additional financial strain on most cash flows, even those with exceptional businesses. This is especially important now as we head into the winter and 2016, with extra associated costs of housing cows during winter milk production.

There is a strong correlation between increased Dry Matter Intake (DMI) per cow and increased milk production and efficiency. Therefore not only is it important to look at the overall balance of your winter diets extracting the most from your conserved forages available, but looking at attention to detail during the housed period.

For example, a balanced formulated diet will undoubtedly save concentrate costs and enhance performance and health. But is the diet being mixed effectively, is each cow receiving the same mix, is there an even spread of forages and concentrates at the start, middle and end of the feed trough?

Feeding areas can have a direct impact upon DMI with poor design reducing feed intakes and increasing the risk of disease for the cow. A common problem with feeding areas is the neck rail positioning. Do your cows have hair loss on their necks? If so then the feed rail needs altering. The neck rail should be positioned around 700mm (depending upon cow size) above the top of the brisket board to give cow's unrestricted access. Feed refusals need to be removed every day before fresh food is offered and feed should be pushed up regularly so that cows can continually reach food as and when they need it.

It is also imperative cows have a constant and clean source of fresh drinking water available. A high yielding cow will need up to 5 litres of water for every 1 litre of milk she produces. Peak drinking water demand coincides with the completion of milking and around sunset when up to 50% of a cow's daily water requirement can be consumed. Cows can drink at a rate of 12-20 litres/min so it is really important to identify peak periods and check adequate trough capacity to meet the cow's demands. With dairy cows being sociable animal trough space is also important with 10% of the herd being able to drink at any point in time, as a guide 10cm/cow of available drinking space is required.

Adequate ventilation is required through sheds. Cows produce massive amounts of heat and water vapour so air flow needs to be maintained to stop a build-up of warm and damp air filled with micro-organisms.

Lying times are also very important as blood flow to the udder increases by 30% when cows lie down opposed to standing. Simple low cost corrections can be made to most cow housing to maximise cow comfort, such as changes in neck rail height and brisket board level.

Question your winter regime today and talk to P&L without obligation.

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