

# DAIRY BRIEFS

University of Wisconsin-Extension ♦ Cooperative Extension

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## Potassium In Forages

Hypocalcemia (low blood-calcium) at the beginning of lactation in dairy cows, is the main cause of several severe metabolic disorders. Three weeks prior to calving, it is desirable to have a moderately anionic diet to avoid milk fever and hypocalcemia. Immediately after calving, a cationic diet is essential. High potassium forages (>2.5%) result in cationic diets and are not desirable to feed immediately prior to calving.

The interest in low potassium forages has caused many to consider practices and expenses not justified based on our knowledge of forage growth and factors affecting potassium composition.

The following points are a summary of current facts:

- 1) Cattle only need low potassium for three weeks prior to calving.
- 2) Soil test and add potassium only as recommended.
- 3) All forages, except corn silage, grown on the same ground contain similar potassium levels at the same maturity.
- 4) Cut alfalfa close to ground.
- 5) Harvest more mature forage for dry cows.
- 6) Rain on windrowed alfalfa significantly reduced potassium concentration.

For more detailed information, contact Mike Wildeck at Marathon County UW-Extension, or you can obtain the UW-Agronomy Department Fact Sheet -- Potassium in Forages, on the web at [www.uwex.edu/ces/forage/index.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/forage/index.html).

*Mike Wildeck  
Dairy Agent*



## Don't Skip The Dry-Cow Therapy

Selective dry-cow therapy (treating only certain animals with dry-cow tubes) isn't such a good idea, according to research published in the January Journal of Dairy Science.

During the study, cows that did not receive dry-cow therapy experienced almost three times more new mastitis infections at calving than treated cows. These cows also had more clinical mastitis cases during the dry period than treated cows.

The findings confirm that cows need to receive dry-cow tubes at dry-off.



## Communication is a Complex Art

The ability to effectively communicate has been a challenge facing all people throughout the world. The challenge in communication is to be able to send the message so the person receiving the message, receives the same message and meaning that the sender intended.

For the person sending a message there are three main modes of communicating meaning in that message, the actual words that are spoken, the tone of voice used and body language. Research shows that in situations where people have a sense of mistrust for the person speaking only 7 percent of the message meaning is carried in the actual words used, 38 percent of the meaning comes from the tone of voice and 55 percent of the meaning is transmitted by the speakers body language. Body language means hand gestures, body posture, openness of the arms, lean of the body, facial expressions, tilt of the head and other signals. It is a subtle nonverbal language, but it is a very trustworthy guide to meaning. Eyes

can show acceptance or rejection, love or hostility, hope or despair, gratitude or indifference, admiration or contempt, threat or safety; the whole gamut of human emotion. The tone of voice used can completely alter the meaning to the opposite. Soft, gentle tones can carry meanings of love or friendship whereas shrill or harsh tones can mean just the opposite. Many times people forget or don't realize the huge importance of nonverbal communication.

The other half of communication is the person receiving the message. Each person's outlook and personality is a conglomeration of everything that has happened to that person throughout their life. No two people have exactly the same background or personality, no two people look at things in exactly the same way. Each of us view things through shaded glasses, glasses which have been tinted by our life experiences and our own unique personality. When communicating we need to be able to remove these tinted glasses in order to have the

ability to look at issues from another persons viewpoint..

As a listener, show an interest in what the other person is saying by saying "I see" or "Uh –Huh" to show you are listening. The listener needs to restate, summarize, and paraphrase back to the speaker to check the meaning and understanding. The listener needs to clarify or ask for additional information if the meaning or message is unclear.

People on both ends of communication need to show empathy and concern for the other. It is far easier for people to compromise if they believe that the other side has an understanding of their own feelings. Good effective communication is an art, it is the goal of the speaker to convey the message as clearly as possible and it is goal of the listener to listen with an open mind in order to receive the message and meaning that the speaker intended to convey.

*Ken Williams  
Vegetable & Grain Crops Agent*

### Coming Events

**June 19-20..... 4-State Professional Dairy Management Seminar** at the Five Flags Center and Holiday Inn, Dubuque, Iowa. Topics include Forages and Rumen Health, and Improving Cow Longevity. Registration is \$95 prior to June 5. Call Mike Wildeck at Marathon County UW-Extension for details, or visit [www.wisc.edu/dysci](http://www.wisc.edu/dysci) on the web for a conference brochure. The event is sponsored by Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin-University Extension.

**July 2-11 ..... Wisconsin Farm Progress Days** in Richland County.

**July 13-15 ..... Badger Dairy Camp** at the UW-Madison campus. For more information contact Ted Halbach, Dairy Science Department at 608-263-3305.

Requests for reasonable accommodations for disabilities or limitations should be made prior to the date of the program or activity for which it is needed. Please do so as early as possible prior to the program or activity so that proper arrangements can be made. Requests are kept confidential.

# Researching Dairy Marketing Alternatives

With some of the constant rise and fall of dairy prices there are a number of producers looking at alternative ways of getting their product to market. One of the methods is bypassing the chain of food processors and marketers and going directly to the customer.

To help local dairy farmers examine their options I thought it would be a good idea to take a look at the amount of market potential there might be in the Wausau area.

To get some market information I contacted a marketing firm called Claritas, Inc., and asked them for an expenditure potential report on groceries and drugs for the city of Wausau. Claritas is one of several firms nationally that specialize in providing market information to anyone willing to pay for it. Within a couple of hours they provided me with a report that gave me some basic demographics on population size and median income as well as itemized totals and per household expenditures

on a number different food and drug items for the city.

The report also provided some very interesting and surprising information, at least to me. In 2000 there was \$1,744,000.00 worth of milk and cream sold to people in the City of Wausau. The average Wausau household spent \$114 and the growth over a 5-year period was only about 0.8%. Wausau, right in the “heart of dairyland”, spent about 5% less on milk and cream than the national average. If you do the calculations (in 2000 the average cow in the county produced 16,900 pounds of milk, a gallon of milk sold for about \$2.25 and a gallon of milk weighs around 8 pounds) it comes out that about 370 cows would supply all the fresh milk and cream for the entire city every year. With 64,000 cows in Marathon County there isn’t a lot of market opportunity for too many dairy farmers.

Wausau residents apparently like their soda pop a lot more. The dollars spent on carbonated beverages was \$4,827,000.00 with an average household expenditure of \$314 and a growth of 2%.

Just by looking at this little bit of data it’s pretty obvious that there may be some opportunity locally but its not all that great. So before investing a bunch of time and money in setting up an on-farm dairy make you first investment in some market information discovering where potential customers live and shop.

*Tom Cadwallader  
Ag Development Agent*

## Wisconsin's Custom Rate Guide

The 2001 edition of the Wisconsin Custom Rate Guide, which reports what farmers paid last season for custom services such as tilling their land, applying fertilizer, or harvesting various crops, is now available from UW-Extension.

Farmers who hired work last year, custom operators who performed the work, and machinery dealers who rent equipment, supplied figures reported in the guide. The guide helps farmers determine appropriate charges for custom farm work, machinery or land rental, and labor during the 2002 growing season. The guide gives average costs for the state as a whole and for specific regions. Data for the guide came from 4,000 respondents to a survey conducted in the fall of 2001.

The report is available at your county University of Wisconsin-Extension office. You may also download it from the UW-Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension (ANRE) website at: [www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/facstaff/rateguide.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/facstaff/rateguide.html).



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### Enhance Forage Analysis with NDFd

Relative Feed Value (RFV) has been of great value in ranking forages for sale or inventorying and assigning forage to animal groups according to their quality needs. However, nearly all dairy producers have encountered a situation where the animal performance they are achieving is not matching the theoretical performance indicated by their forage quality analysis.

Recent research has demonstrated that ADF and lignin do not account for all the variation in NDF or forage digestibility. These trends have been noted by nutritionists over the years and they came to generally distrust the calculated TDN and NEL values which have been based on ADF. University of Wisconsin researchers and others also noted these trends and worked on a better way of evaluating forages for true digestible nutrient content, and thus energy availability.

This issue took a national stage with the publishing of the 2001 Nutrient Recommendations of Dairy Cattle (NRC), which changed its recommended way of calculating forage digestibility from an ADF base to one which uses a summative

approach where energy contributed from protein, fat, non-fiber carbohydrate, and NDF are summed. NDF digestibility (NDFd) is required to use in this summative energy prediction for forages.

Why should you care about these changes in forage quality analysis? Research has demonstrated that lactating dairy cows will eat more dry matter and produce more milk when the fed forages have higher NDF digestibility values. Using the NDFd value will result in more accurately balanced rations or more predictable animal response to a given forage that you are feeding.

The NDFd is now reported on all forage analyses performed by the UW Forage Labs. It is determined by either wet chemistry or NIR. Some commercial labs also offer similar forage analysis. The NDFd test will cost a few dollars more than a standard NIR analysis, but the added information will pay for itself easily.

*Ken Barnett*  
*Field Crops and Farm Mgt. Agent*

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