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TIPS TO PREVENT DIGESTIVE DISORDER IN DAIRY COWS

Displaced Abomasum or DA, also known as twisted stomachs, can be controlled through feeding and management, according to a University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension dairy nutritionist.

Abomasal displacements cause economic loss in dairy herds through treatment costs, premature culling and production loss. This digestive disorder occurs when the gas-filled abomasum migrates and is trapped by the rumen causing cows to go off feed. Incidence rates for abomasal displacements are highest in the spring.

Eighty to ninety percent of all abomasal displacements are left sided (LDA), and estimates of average annual incidence rates for LDA range from 1.4 to 5.8 percent in commercial dairy herds, explains Randy Shaver. Annual incidence rates for individual herds within these studies ranged from 0 to 22 percent. This wide range in annual incidence rates among herds indicates that feeding and management practices play a large role in preventing LDA, Shaver explains.

Eighty to ninety percent of LDA are diagnosed within one month of calving. This shows that the transition period, two weeks before calving through two to four weeks after calving, is

the major risk period for LDA, Shaver says. Improving feeding and management practices during this period has the greatest potential for preventing LDA, explains Shaver.

In the transition period, cows typically have depressed feed intakes during the week before calving followed by a slow intake increase during the first few weeks after calving. Low feed consumption during the transition period increases the risk of LDA through lower rumen fill and increased incidence of other calving related disorders, such as ketosis and milk fever, explains Shaver. Low rumen fill may provide greater opportunity for migration of the abomasum, adds Shaver.

Other factors that increase the risk of LDA include:

- Excess body condition score at calving,
- Minimal or excessive lead feeding of concentrates before calving,
- Increase the feeding rate of concentrates too rapidly in the first several weeks after calving,
- Chopping forages too finely,
- Heavy corn silage forage programs for dry cows and transition cows, and
- Poor feed bunk management

To help prevent LDA, Shaver makes these recommendations:

- Implement good feeding and management programs for far-off and close-up dry cows and early fresh cows.
- Strive to minimize the incidence of other calving-related disorders, such as ketosis and milk fever.
- Calve cows with body condition score of 3.5 or 3.75.
- Feed concentrates to close-up dry cows at the rate of .50 to .75 percent of body weight.
- Feed a TMR to close-up dry cows and early fresh cows to control forage: concentrate ratio.

- For component feeding systems, increase the feeding rate of concentrates gradually over the first six weeks of lactation until peak levels are reached and feed concentrates three to four times each day.
- TMRs should contain 8 to 10 percent of the particles over 1.5 inches long and haycrop silages should be chopped to contain 15 to 20 percent of the particles over 1.5 inches long (weight basis).
- Bailed hay, about five pounds per cow per day, may be beneficial in rations for dry cows and transition cows.
- Limit corn silage to less than 50 percent of the forage dry matter for dry cows and transition cows.
- Balance rations for adequate fiber concentrations.
- Provide adequate bunk space and keep plenty of feed and water available for dry cows and transition cows.
- Provide a comfortable environment for cows.
- Ensure proper TMR mixing, and minimize over-mixing which can reduce ration physical form, and minimize sorting of the ration in the feed bunk.

For more information, contact the UW-Extension, Jefferson County office at (920) 674-7196.

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