

TREATING “DRY COWS” AS IF THEY WERE “PREGNANT MOTHERS”

“No one has time to take care of their health, but everyone will indeed find time to be sick”

Old Chinese Proverb

I had a funny thought the other day, one that caused me to sit down and put these words on paper. I was imagining a husband saying to his friends “I just found out my wife is pregnant again, so I’m putting her out back in the old shed, feeding her nothing but the worst table scraps, and basically ignoring her for 9 months, because we want a perfect baby out of this! Oh, and we expect her to stay perfectly healthy too!” Ooooh, Smart!

Well, of course, no one in their right mind would do that, but yet, and this is my point, this is what many people do with their pregnant animals, aka, in the dairy world, by the nickname “dry cows”. So often I’ve heard, “well, let’s give this moldy hay to the old dry cows, or let’s put the dry cows out on *that* pasture (the one that is barren with no nutrition in it)” and other such signs of poor care. I’m even thinking that the term “dry cow”, while somewhat descriptive since they were “dried off”, might be a bit degrading and therefore somewhat damaging to the care of these animals. In reality, they are really “expectant mothers”. A kinder, more appreciative term!

Over the past 50 years or so, many herd health problems have escalated as production demands have “driven the bus”. Not that old-timers didn’t have their share of problems, we know this because they had text books for solving problems too, long before antibiotics, hormone injections and steroids came into being. It’s just that we have we have traded some of the simple problems for more and more metabolic and immune problems.

Dentist-epidemiologist-genius Weston A. Price (who’s work Sally Fallon’s organization is based upon) went around the world trying to figure out why some people have rotten, crooked teeth, and squinchy narrow jaws, made the connection between a true and traditional diet and the presence of snow white, perfect teeth. He noted brilliantly that if one’s teeth are healthy, everything else is too! His contemporary Francis Pottenger, MD, saw it too, and noted that dietary-caused weakness travel downstream for four generations. Dr. Price was the first to truly document that no matter where he went, every single one of those indigenous peoples who were in super health, had 11 dietary factors in common. Topping the list was the fact that they fed special things to the pregnant women. These bearers of the young got the best stuff, mainly more minerals and more fat soluble vitamins. Hummmmm.... I’ll bet you know where I’m going with this.

If you have seen Doc Holiday’s immune level chart for pregnancy, you know that all pregnant females have a huge, and I mean huge, dip in their immune system and it comes at a terrible time, about 3 weeks before calving (and beyond). Why did God do this to pregnant animals? it seems the opposite of what is needed because it leaves the

poor cow unable to send fleets of white blood cells and antibodies to the udder, the uterus, the feet or anywhere else. Here's why. By now the growing baby is perceived by the mother's body as a "foreign body", something to be destroyed, so it's a necessary evil to "switch off" the immune system so the baby isn't rejected. God, of course, must be refining these details for the better now as we ponder it. But, until he does, we must help things out a bit.

AS PRODUCTION GOES UP, REPRODUCTION GOES DOWN

If we don't set up some additional and natural protections, a whole plethora of nasty diseases may set up shop in the pregnant mother. This is actually the period of time when almost all mastitis gets started, as well as conditions that lead to high somatic cell counts (actually infectious beginnings), uterine infections and even infections in the lungs (pneumonia) or the feet (foot rot or hairy heel wart). Systemic infections such as TB, brucellosis or Johne's are more likely to jump in now as well.

Additionally many metabolic diseases may come about at this time. This is not connected so much to the immune deficiencies but are mostly due to vitamin or mineral deficiencies, nutritional deficiencies, or mineral imbalances. These include problems such as milk fever, tetany, ketosis, fatty liver syndrome, downer cows, retained placenta, dystocia (difficulty in calving), and eventually reproductive collapse. I think I've just named almost every health liability to raising dairy cattle! No wonder we have our eyes on prevention as being far, far better than cure.

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE CHILD

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. And what this means is that it's hard to imagine a baby being much healthier than the mother. Mediocre womb quality during gestation followed by mediocre milk adds up to a sick baby (and a mediocre future mother and producer). This is how we get pneumonia, parasites, scours, coccidia, and generally weak sickly calves. For brevity I'm speaking of cows and calves, but everything I've just said applies directly to lambs, kids, piglets, and, alas, our kids!

A STITCH IN TIME, SAVES.....A COW AND A CALF!

In general, cows become most productive for the first 40 to 60 days after they freshen. Around 60 days is the time that they also become the most likely to become fertile again. If they do not conceive by about 100 days, that is not a good thing and bodes of fertility problems such as some retained placenta, a cystic ovary, retained corpus luteum, or other hormonal or infectious problems. Maybe, just maybe, she is suffering from malnutrition. Much of this goes back to coming into motherhood depleted, "fried" from poor care and poor diet while pregnant. Then comes the big drain of milk production so we can have butter on our toast and our ice cream. Studies at Cornell showed that over half the dairy cows were upside-down nutritionally during this period, that is they were burning their bodies up to stay alive, so much so that their livers get

choked with all the fat they are pulling out of their body. This is ketosis and may lead to fatty liver syndrome. They are also inclined to get anemic and weak.

To honor this first 100 day period, Jerry Brunetti named his flagship product Hemocell 100 after this super critical time period and formulated the product to be a probiotic source for the rumen and gut, herbal tonic to strengthen the liver and digestion, anemia reverser, detoxifier (clay and charcoal), enzyme source, along with all the chelated and balanced minerals that protect us when we are under stress. Only 2 ounces a day during the first three months dropping down to an ounce daily will do the trick.

As time goes by, milk production goes down, down, down. Ideally, more and more bodily attention is paid to the growing calf that was conceived around 60 days into the lactation. It's usually around 305 days into this process that the cow is "dried off". She then has another 60 days to focus all her energy on rebuilding herself, as well to build the new calf that should be inside. We are back to the state of being a pregnant mother again. Just in time for the immune system to dip again. It's hard work being a mother!

TOP TEN WAYS TO REWARD YOUR "PREGNANT MOTHERS" WITH T.L.C.

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- 1) Beware of and prevent the Big Three: a) MOLD in the forages or feed. Try to avoid moldy hay or feed, but also use a good absorptive detox clay such as Dynamine.  
b) Watch out for excess NITROGEN in "funny protein", low sulfur forages (causing MUN and BUN levels to rise), prevent by having high brix forages, and c) avoid ACIDOSIS by maximizing dry matter in forages, as well as adding non-fibrous carbohydrates (which may include molasses if the forages are low sugar).
- 2) Rule out the other major causes of problems which may include high potash (potassium) forages, stray voltage on the farm, water quality issues (more common than most people realize!), and avoid over-conditioning (too fat).
- 3) To get the jump on milk fever, tetany, downer cow, and retained placentas, keep the Ca:P ratio correct, the calcium should be at least 1.2% and the phosphorus at least 0.35%. Keep the P up so the cow can make enough energy. Also keep the magnesium:potassium ratio correct, Mg should be over 0.35% and K should be less than 2.5% because it interferes with the calcium and magnesium uptake. Magnesium is a cofactor necessary to absorb calcium. Sulfur should be about 10% of the nitrogen level to assure that all the essential amino acids are being made (that means high quality protein).
- 4) The main minerals for pregnancy and freshening without problems include zinc, copper, cobalt, manganese, molybdenum, iron, selenium, chromium and others. The best way to get these are from mineral rich soil that is alive with microbiology and balanced. Short of that, keep a full array of free-choice minerals available including a

good mineral mix such as Grazier's Essentials Lick, top notch kelp, Dynamine and a good seasalt.

5) Ketosis, Fatty Liver Syndrome and Death (the worst symptom of all) can come from both over-nutritioning, ironically, but more commonly underfeeding and malnourishment. The most critical time is a week before and a week after freshening. This is the time to maximize digestible dry matter, lots of digestible carbohydrates (may be a good time to add molasses up to 5% of the total carbs).

6) Apple Cider Vinegar is a fantastic source of additional digestible fuel at this time plus it serves as the world's best known rumen tonic. Add up to one ounce per 10 gallons of water. If the other cattle get it, so much the better.

7) Use Hemocell 100 as it was intended, especially for the first 100 days after freshening. Give high producing cows up to 2 oz. daily and "dry cows" about an ounce a day. This is also a tonic for breeding. Many cows who have fallen aside and won't settle can be straightened out by using daily Hemocell 100 along with a full nutritional program.

8) There are incredible tools available to insure your freshening goes well. This is especially true if you are trying to emerge from chronic and frustrating herd health problems. Consult with your veterinarian in all matters before you do this, but injectable programs work well here. A powerful immune boost can be achieved by using S.Q. injections of vitamins A,D and E, as well as using Mu-Se (selenium and vitamin E) OR Multi-Min which also includes zinc, copper and manganese. It's also a time to consider injecting whey colostrum products such as those from ImPro or Agri-Dynamics Biocell CBT. Quite often these are given right at the "dry off" time, then 3 weeks before calving, at calving, and again about 3-4 weeks after calving. These are powerful immune tonics and cheap insurance.

9) Use Holistic Management concepts if you continue to have problems. Evaluate your overall herd genetics (this is where selection and culling play a role), your forage program (brix levels as well as mineral issues), then review all of your management techniques. Look for what Jerry Brunetti calls "the cause behind the cause, behind the cause". Common sources of problems include forced production, use of rBST, low quality forages, chronic mold issues, bad water and other deep sources. Always think about the Big Picture.

10) Keep your COW FIRST AID KIT handy. Milk fever, tetany and downer syndrome hit hard, as does ketosis and fatty liver syndrome. Hours and even minutes count. This is not the time to "go shopping" for the right products. Every herd, no matter how healthy can be stricken with a case that would otherwise require a call to the vet (or to the rendering company!). Quick thinking and quick treatment saves cows, saves calves, saves money! See [www.willwinter.com](http://www.willwinter.com) for my recommended list of what you need to have on hand in your Herd Health Emergency Kit.

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