

HERD HEALTH TIPS: COW COOLING

Summer is fast approaching us here in California's central valley. Days will soon be long and hot. Minimizing heat stress for cows is an important management practice which helps reduce the negative effects of hot summer months. The main goals of cow cooling programs include maintaining dry matter intake and milk production, as well as decreasing health risks associated with heat, maintaining reproductive performance, and increasing overall cow comfort- which can translate into increased profits!!!.

Some general ways to help reduce heat stress for dairy cows include:

1) SHADE- while any shade is better than none, solid shade is more effective than slotted shade or cloth, but also more expensive. Shade should be at least 12-18 feet high and are generally oriented north to south (helps keep ground under shade dry- east to west orientation can provide longer periods of shade, but require more ground maintenance to keep surface under dry). Some areas that shade may be beneficial include center of corrals, over milk barn **and** wash/holding pen, over feed lanes, over water, and freestalls.

2) SPRINKLERS/MISTERS- do not block solar radiation but can keep cows cool with evaporative cooling and cooling air around the cows. Can be used alone, but are also excellent when combined with shade and/or fans. Some beneficial areas to install sprinklers/misters include feed lanes, loafing areas/under freestalls, wash/holding pens, over milk barn exit lanes, and in milk barns as they leave rapid exit systems.

3) VENTILATION/FANS- Fans can increase ventilation to cows by circulating air. Fans can be used alone, but are most effective when used under shade/freestalls. Fans can also be combined with a mister system to provide cool air circulation.

4) WATER- Providing adequate water to all cows is essential, especially in the summer. Cows should have water available at all times. One especially beneficial and profitable area to provide water is in the return lanes as cows leave the milking barn. When cows drink before entering the corrals they tend to consume 15% more water overall, and are also more likely to head to the feed bunks. And remember, water is cheap!

The above are only some very general ideas on how to help limit the effects of heat stress in cows. An especially important and sometimes overlooked cooling area is the milk barn. This is one of the only areas where you have the potential to control all the milking cows environment at least 2 times a day! There can be great financial benefits in providing shade/cooling for the entire milk barn, including the wash pen and holding pens. Installing fans and misters under the shade increases the benefits even more. And don't forget your dry cows, they also get heat stressed which translates into decreased milk production after freshening. Remember, they are your future milkers.

In summary, get your cows cool this summer! Be creative! Ask around about cooling systems, and don't hesitate to ask your veterinarian any questions. Properly installed cooling systems will greatly cushion the negative effects of summer heat and generally have excellent cost-return ratios, translating into increased profits for your dairy.