



Feeding excess milk to the dairy herd

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In situations where you have excess milk or will be paid a very low amount for milk, one thing to consider is feeding some of it to your calves. Calves can be fed ad libitum or up to 12 quarts of milk per day in two feedings. Make increases over a few days to avoid scours. Feeding high levels of milk to calves will slow down rumen development because calves fed this amount of milk will not eat any or very limited starter. In this current situation the economy of not buying milk replacer and calf starter likely makes sense. We suggest offering some free choice forage – either hay or silage/haylage to help with eventual rumen development. In addition, about two weeks before weaning, offer calves some starter or grower to adapt them to grain. Calves can be fed milk up to three or four months of age, at which point they will most likely have reasonable rumen development from eating forage and a small amount of grain. This will keep them growing after milk feeding is stopped. Keep in mind that extending the milk feeding period will increase the number of calves you need to house in the preweaning area. If you need to move calves to group housing to accommodate the increased calf numbers, be aware that group-fed calves fed high levels of milk will tend to suckle each other at times. This has to be avoided because cross-sucking can lead to infections that cause blind quarters in newly calved heifers. Problem calves could be removed or fitted with a nose weaner. Providing access to a dry teat so calves satisfy their need to suck and reducing competition between calves help reduce cross sucking behavior. Limit the size of the group and keep the age range of calves to about 7 to

10 days to help reduce competition. Older heifers can be fed milk also if housing and feeding situations are available, but again as they are group-housed suckling can be an issue. One or two heifers coming in with blind quarters as a result of cross suckling is a high price to pay for a small savings on calf feed costs. The bottom line is that by feeding extra milk to calves you can minimize calf starter. You should be careful that these heifers get enough vitamins and minerals, particularly minerals, because they are growing rapidly; however, milk is high in calcium and phosphorus which are two of the minerals needed in the largest amounts to support growth. In addition, if you are used to feeding a coccidiostat in your milk replacer or starter, you can buy a milk supplement that is fed in very low amounts (typically 1 or 2 ounces per day) to get this into the calves' diet. A milk extender is not needed in this situation; all you need is a small supplement for a coccidiostat and possibly some vitamins and trace minerals. The biggest concern of feeding milk to calves is that they may get fat and grow very fast, which is not particularly good after 4 months of age due to mammary development problems, so it is best not to extend milk feeding to older heifers.

In addition, milk can be added to a heifer TMR or a dairy cow TMR. Be careful with odors and spoilage and flies, which can be large problems. In addition, this milk is not pasteurized and can be a source of disease transmission on a farm. Diseases such as Johnnes, Lucosis, Salmonella, to name a few can be easily spread through unpasteurized milk. Discuss the use of this with your Veterinarian before you start feeding unpasteurized milk to any dairy animals. A TMR for heifers can contain 60 to 70% moisture, and a milking cow TMR up to 60% moisture, and in either case this should not reduce dry matter intake. Milk can be added to the TMR according to your nutritionist's formulation program. Depending on your milk components, on a dry matter basis milk often contains 24-26% protein, 28-30% fat and 38-40% lactose (sugar) so it is an excellent source of energy and protein for a dairy animal. For dairy

heifers, a limited amount of forage and milk can easily meet their nutrient requirements for growth and for cows it can add some of the protein, sugar, and energy needed.

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