



Points to consider to reduce milk production

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In situations where a farm decides to produce less milk, consider the following points.

Obviously, every case is different and each farm has to be looked at independently.

- Reduce herd size by culling unwanted and poor quality animals. This obviously has a permanent result and may not make economic sense depending on market prices for cull cows
- Reduce heifer numbers to those that are needed. Many farms with improved reproduction, improved foot and leg health resulting from better management, along with reduced calf/heifer mortality and age at calving, often need only 7 or even 6 heifers (from birth to calving) for each 10 cows (milking and dry) in the herd. Reducing the number of heifers will reduce farm feed costs and save forages.
- If you are milking 3X, go to 2X and reduce milk production a bit.
- Dry off some cows early – with the precaution of not allowing them to get fat during a prolonged dry period. Limit feeding, either using poor quality forage or less total dry matter per day, will make this potential problem less. Keep body condition in the range of 3.0 to 3.5.

- Feed higher forage diets to your herd. Since the objective is less milk production and less direct (current) out-of-pocket feed costs, this will be effective as long as you have available forage inventory. Culling the milking herd and heifer numbers can help make this more achievable.
- Limit feed dairy cows. For many years, research into limit feeding beef cows at maintenance and growing heifers has been conducted with great success. The biggest advantage from limit feeding is that it improves feed efficiency. In addition, there have been some studies using limit feeding in lactating cows. Our interpretation of this data is you can reduce dry matter intake by 5 to 15% (depending on how much less milk you wish to achieve), feed a higher forage diet if possible, which will help if cows slug feed, and the result is a 5 to 10% reduction in milk production. While cows produce less total milk; milk fat, protein, and lactose percentages often go up. This research was designed to look at how to make cows more efficient at producing fat and protein, but it can be used in our current situation to reduce total milk production. It is important to understand that this should be done after peak milk and after breeding as these both would be affected negatively. Also, keep in mind that when cows go down in milk post peak, this trend is not reversible. Lower milk production will persist for the remainder of the lactation, even if you increase feed it will not completely reverse. It is likely that your nutritionist does not have a balancer to do this change. Just feed the same TMR, but less of it.