

Transition Periods: Change is Tough

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Coming home from a two week vacation can be a painful adjustment back to real life. For dairy cows, transitioning back into the milking herd after a 55 – 60 day vacation can be even more stressful. She won't be worried about office gossip she missed; she is adjusting to the rigor of producing upwards of 80, 90, even 100+ lbs of milk/day. Setting her up for a trouble free transition into lactation is critical for her productivity.

The transition period begins about 3 weeks before calving. During this time the fetal calf is continuing to grow, the cow has begun to move nutrients into her mammary glands for the production of colostrum, and her body is preparing to give birth. As her due date approaches, the cow begins to eat less until the day she calves when she will consume less, and sometimes very little, feed. Proper nutrition during these 3 weeks is critical for her health and productivity after calving. Research has shown that increased intake during the transition period, and especially the day of calving, helps cows get off to a better start in their lactation.

Consider this: Every 1 lb increase in peak milk production equals 200 lb more milk over the lactation.

Close-Up Diets: What's changed?

For years close-up cows were fed diets that were energy dense and similar to the lactation ration. Because of the high energy demand at calving, it was assumed that getting as much energy as possible into these cows was necessary. However, with energy rich diets, cows can put on condition which is not desirable during this period. As mentioned earlier, feed intake drops as the cow approaches calving, feeding energy dense diets do not encourage better intakes because the energy needed is provided in a more condensed package.

Recently, several studies have pointed to the benefit of feeding a low energy, high straw diet to pre-fresh cows. They have been very successful on large dairies and show promising health benefits for the cow. Low energy/high straw diets maintain better gut fill because the cow needs to eat more to meet her energy requirements. This is important in preventing displaced abomasum (DAs) after calving. This type of diet also prevents excess weight gain which leads to less calving issues and less metabolic disorders post-calving. Also, there are numerous nutrients and nutritional supplements that have been found to help improve the intake, immunity and production of cows during the transition period. *And nothing produces milk quite as well as a healthy cow.*

Transition 21

Transition 21 is designed to be fed during the 3 weeks before and after calving. This supplement is formulated with specific nutrients to enhance milk production, components, and support immunity. Utilizing this supplement in conjunction with well-balanced transition diets will help get cows off to a strong and healthy start.

Transition Tips

1. Dry cows should be between a 3.5 and 3.75 on a 5 point scale for body condition
2. Keep dry cows eating by pushing feed up
3. Make sure water sources are clean and supply adequate quantities
4. Avoid salt or free choice sodium bicarbonate in the dry period
5. If straw is not available, a low quality hay will work as well
6. Make sure to chop straw into pieces 2 inches in length or less to prevent sorting
7. Avoid heat stress in dry cows; it can further decrease intakes, lower colostrum quality, and lead to lower birth weight calves
8. Use fly control in the summer to prevent infestations which can lead to mastitis