Dairy Australia

INCALF

# Checklist for Transition Cow Management

Use this checklist to help you implement the key steps for a successful transition period.

**1 Decide whether you will use a low DCAD approach (recommended) or a low calcium (Zeolite A) approach**

**2 Feed the transition diet for as close to 21 days (low DCAD approach) or 14 days (low calcium Zeolite A approach) as possible**

- ☐ This relies on accurate calving dates. Early pregnancy testing all cows and heifers by a skilled operator between 5-15 weeks of gestation will enable this.

**3 Sourcing and testing forage**

- ☐ Obtain a single consignment of forage from one source if possible.
- ☐ Test forage with both a standard feed test and wet chemistry mineral analysis.
- ☐ Test pasture if it will comprise more than 2kg DM/cow/day in the transition diet.

**4 Balancing the diet***

- ☐ Attend a Putting Transition Cow Management into Practice workshop.
- ☐ Work with a nutrition advisor or use the Transition Diet Milk Fever Risk Calculator to adjust feeding levels to meet energy and protein requirements and manage milk fever risk.
- ☐ If feeding a concentrate designed for milkers, check that it doesn't contain bicarbonate as a buffer.

* Do you plan on using a commercial lead feed pellet, DIY acidogenic salts (e.g. mag chloride), Zeolite A or something else? Use the same concentrate type as you will use after calving (e.g. grain or pellets).

**5 Choosing your springer paddock(s)**

- ☐ Chose paddocks that have not been irrigated with effluent or received heavy applications of potassium fertilisers. Rotating calving paddocks is good practice to avoid nutrient loading.
- ☐ Repair leaking troughs, boggy gateways and restrict access to dams to manage mastitis risk. Also scrape or wash down feed pad regularly (if applicable).
- ☐ Calculate daily pasture mass[1] and strip graze to manage intakes especially if it will comprise more than 2kg DM/cow/day in the transition diet.
- ☐ If applicable, ensure you have enough trough space (at least 75cm per cow) and/or hay rings (at least 1 per 20 cows) to ensure all cows and heifers have equal access to transition diet.
- ☐ Use a mineral dispenser if putting DIY salts (e.g. mag chloride) in water troughs. These are available from most rural stores. Calibrate regularly according to manufacturer's directions.
- ☐ Ensure free access at all times to high quality water

**6 Staff**

- ☐ Ensure staff have been adequately trained in their required tasks and simple, written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are available to them.

**7 Feeding out**

- ☐ Ensure you've made realistic allowances for wastage (may be up to 35% when fed on bare ground).
- ☐ Start milking cows and heifers early if they have udder oedema or are running milk.

If feeding concentrates through the dairy:

- ☐ Check and calibrate feed systems regularly.
- ☐ Observe for mastitis and apply teat disinfectant to all surfaces of teats daily.

**8 Monitor the success of your program**

- ☐ Use Cow Health Problems at Calving Tally Sheet or existing herd recording system to monitor cow health.
- ☐ Use Transition Program Review Worksheet to assess how well the program worked and plan any changes.

For more information on transition cow management **click here**

1 Average pasture intake per cow can be estimated as follows:

$$\text{Intake (kg DM per cow per day)} = \frac{A \times (B - C)}{D}$$

Where:

A = area of paddock (ha)

B = estimated kg DM per ha in paddock pre-grazing

C = estimated kg DM per ha in paddock post-grazing

D = number of cows in paddock

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