

The Maturity Problem

Many dairies are missing two key opportunities to improve profitability. Calving in mature heifers (we can call them “Platinum Heifers”) is the first step. Achieving this goal requires intentionality and attention to detail. Heifers need to be 55-58% of the herd mature body weight (MBW) at conception and 85% of MBW immediately after calving. Mature heifers transition well, have lower still births, less transition disease and have higher peak milk. They are also less likely to be culled early. Many dairies do not know the MBW of the cows. Lactation 3+ cows between 80 and 150 DIM need to be weighed to establish this very important number. Secondly, providing the management, nutrition, facilities and stockmanship to create and retain mature older cows (“Golden Girls”) allows the dairy the opportunity to produce more milk per cow, sell more heifers to dairy or beef crosses and reduce heifer inventory. Key objectives to economic sustainability. Dairies on pasture can average over 4 lactations per cow but confined dairies are often in the low 2’s. Since heifers only break even in Lactation 2 it is obvious that keeping a healthy productive heifer/cow makes compelling financial sense. Several factors stand in the way of achieving herd maturity. These can be memorably described as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”. These 4 factors are transition disease, mastitis, lameness and reproduction/production. It must be noted that heat abatement is critical on any dairy that desires to achieve the goal of retaining the “Golden Girls”. This presentation gives key information needed to help overcome “The Maturity Problem”.

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