

Straight to Your Bottom Line

The Rain Effect

By: Jay Thurman

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Wow- How about all the rain! The challenges presented on the dairy by rain are typically pretty well understood and managed. Scraping pens and cleaning cows are always a top priority, managing lagoon levels gets to be more important as the rains continue. Mastitis becomes more prevalent and takes more management in wet conditions also. Feed in the bunk gets wet and nasty and sometimes must be pushed out. The to-do list gets fairly far reaching and significant. The one aspect I would like to address in this article is - How are you managing the feeding of your cows in wet weather?

Pushing out wet feed is one management tool, but are you actively correcting the dry matter measurement of your feed ingredients to account for the additional weight of the water that is soaked up by the ingredients? Short term rain events, no doubt have an effect on the actual dry matter of feed ingredients, but they are much less impactful than extended periods of wet weather. In fact, an afternoon thunderstorm might be only a blip on the feed screen a few weeks from now. However, an extended rain event, like the one we have been recently experiencing, can have a major and long term effect.

Recently, at a dairy I work with we measured the dry matter on a few feed ingredients and did the math to figure out what the real DMI of the cows had been lately. Have you noticed that intakes always seem to get higher during an extended wet weather event? The fact of the matter is we think dry matter intakes are increasing but the cows are actually getting less feed on a dry matter basis. Due to rain, runoff, standing water and humidity, the silages, and hay dry matter had decreased 4% points. The "dry" ingredients stored in the commodity barn were closer to 2% wetter. So what effect does that have?

If we assume that the ration is 60% forage and 40% concentrates and a presumed dry matter intake of 50 lbs. It means we are feeding 28.8lbs of forage instead of 30, and 19.6lbs of concentrates instead of 20lbs. So 48.4lbs of DMI instead of the 50lbs we thought we were feeding. No big deal right? With a feed efficiency conversion of 1.4 that would equate to 2.24lbs of milk production lost. On top of that, how much more energy is required to walk through the mud?

An afternoon thunderstorm blows over and drops a half inch of rain, feed gets wet, we lose a couple pounds of milk, tomorrow everything straightens up – all manageable. But over a two or three week period where it just gets and stays wet - unless you make the proper adjustments the milk loss and body condition loss will become noticeable in the cows and in your milk check. Keep up with the cows in wet weather by taking dry matters regularly, be proactive when you can getting feed in front of the cows, provide the nutrients they need to make up for the wet feed and extra demands – if you can do all those the reward will go Straight to Your Bottom Line.