

2x versus 3x milking

At present we are milking twice a day. I am wondering about milking three times a day. What are the advantages? Does 3x make you more money? Does it cut down on the number of mastitis outbreaks?

INDIANA

D. W.

Many dairies are milking their herds three times a day (3x). There does appear to be advantages according to the dairy producers practicing this method. Before beginning the practice, there are some key points to think about.

As a general rule, dairy producers have reported a 7 to 12 percent increase in production within a week of moving from 2x to 3x. There are some common sense reasons for this occurrence.

After a cow is milked, the pressure in the udder is relieved which, in turn, stimulates the entire chemistry of the cow to begin filling the udder once again. This is particularly helpful in heifers with smaller udders. When you think about it, a dairy cow is programmed to satisfy the needs of a calf. When the cow is milked the message is "the calf will get hungry again; better keep the groceries coming."

Many dairy producers report a drop in the somatic cell count when they move to 3x milking. Some of the speculation is less udder stress due to more frequent milking. There is less of a chance of udder injury with less milk in the udder during the day along with it being easier for a cow to get up and down with less milk in the udder. It has been observed that there is less leakage before milking. If a cow is lying down with milk leaking out of the teat ends, this probably will promote bacteria buildup.

Financially, the additional 7 to 12 percent milk will require a 5 to 8 percent higher operating cost. Once again, this is not well documented, and dairy producers will have to monitor cost versus benefit on their

own dairy. Among the added costs, there will be more labor and more electricity used to harvest and cool the additional milk. More milk will require more feed. Victor Cabrera from the University of Wisconsin-Madison has a 3x calculator on the UW website at www.uwex.edu/ces/dairymgt/tools/Milk3X_1.swf. This is an interactive calculator where a dairy producer can enter information on his or her own dairy to determine if the financial part of 3x makes dollars and cents.

Here are some other key points to remember in making a 3x decision. If you are totally reliant on family labor, the three milkings may get old in a hurry. Cows should be at least milking over 70 pounds a day to justify the extra effort. Management styles are important; after all, there are 2x herds milking at high levels.

Cows need to be doing mainly three things in a 24-hour period: eating, resting, and milking. When cows are being moved and standing in a holding area, time is being taken away from the three things they most enjoy doing. Keep the movement to and the time in the holding area to a minimum. Another health issue to watch is teat end damage. The more times a cow is milked, the more time inflammations are on the teats. Monitor this closely to prevent undue irritation. Also, watch for extra hoof wear as walking distances go up.

— GARY SIPIORSKI
Vita Plus

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