

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



November was a pretty busy month with planting the corn crop and harvesting grass silage. Also, with the recent downturn in the world economy we have been working from every possible angle to minimize costs to maintain our economic advantage in producing milk.

When we were getting the ground ready for planting this season, I was exposed to a whole new kind of crop production methods. The first major difference was that almost every crop was planted in a pasture taken out of production for the season. They had specialized attachments (most of them 3-point hitch type) for working up pastures. You will not find many large tow-behind implements because they are not able to fit through the gateways of pasture. Most of these implements are about 3 meters wide and have PTO powered tillers. My personal favorite was the power harrow. It has 6 sets of 2 fingers going into the ground with a leveling roller/depth adjuster on the back. The beauty of the system is that when you are running through the field, the powered fingers work up a small hill of dirt in front of the implement which helps to level out any rough spots in the field. It does a great job of breaking up clods of grass roots which is something that I know our implements sometimes have trouble with when ripping pasture.

Approximately half of our crop was planted on peat this year which is the spongiest ground I have ever been on. You can be driving along just humming and then all of the sudden the tractor will drop about 3 feet down into the ground. When you are pulling a lime cart across the ground you have to travel at the highest speed possible without bouncing out of the seat to keep the trailer from sinking.

The covered feed pad that Ben installed has already been a big help and since summer began on December 1st we are already seeing an improvement in cow comfort as the cows desire to be on the pad around midday.

It is getting to the point where I am beginning to plan for the transition cows and am looking at ways to set them up for high performance lactation. Some of the obstacles that I will be facing are the fact that these cows are on grass and are therefore consuming a high NDF diet. This will hurt their intake pre-partum and if research conducted at the University of Wisconsin is correct, will play a major part in the dry matter intake (DMI) of the cow post-partum. The potato and bread waste that we use in our diets is very digestible and low in NDF and should help us to increase the cows' intakes. Another hurdle is being that they are on pasture and spring all the milkers are run in one group, it will be hard to feed them a specialized diet once they are in the milking herd.

I have a feeling that strategic feeding of the cows will play a big part in setting us up for a successful milking period with the fresh cows. Continuing to feed them in the afternoon but possibly moving the feeding to after milking will help to manage heat stress made worse from our energy dense diets. I think we will also leave free choice salt lick in the race to make up for salt that is lost during sweating. I found out how quick a mineral deficiency can show up in the cows when we switched to a new mineral mix and I was a little mixed up with what was in it. There was not enough calcium, magnesium, and salt in the diet between the new mineral mix and the other feedstuffs and within about four days the cows became lethargic. Just goes to show how much attention to detail counts.

With regards to the lactation diet, I have hit a new hurdle. I am not sure if this is even possible but I would like to throw it out there for consideration. We put down a stack of grass silage with inoculant applied. Leftover inoculant was shaken over the stack at the end of packing I think due to a possible applicator malfunction. Here is my question, would it be possible if there was leftover inoculant on the grass and the stack was opened relatively quickly (eg. 3 weeks) for the cows to become acidotic or perhaps have sub-acute cases. It only occurred to me that it might of happened because when I ran out of corn silage, I added a small amount of grass silage (< 0.5kg) to hold the potato waste together and the cows fat test inverted. They are not coming up lame though but it occurred to me that an inoculant that permits lactic acid producing bacteria to grow if ingested by the cows might cause a pH imbalance in the rumen. Don't know if it is possible, just tossing ideas around.

I'm sure there are some topics I was dying to talk about but I just can't think of right now...so until next time.