

November 2014 Newsletter

I recently responded to a call about a “cow off-feed” in a tie-stall barn. In examining the fresh cow, I found that she was moderately dehydrated with mild-moderate mastitis in one quarter. While the mastitis didn’t explain the level of dehydration, we addressed treating the mastitis and went ahead with pumping her to help her hydration status. While we were pumping this cow with oral fluids, I noticed that her water bowl had very little water and when checked, found it to be non-functioning. We pailed water to this cow, which she drank aggressively. Do you think this cow was off feed because of the mastitis or the lack of water?

We know that water is essential to life, but this case teaches us how important water is to the life of a productive dairy cow. The composition of milk is roughly 87% water. Logically, proper amounts of quality water is linked to quality milk, the main revenue as dairy producers. While close attention is paid to the water quality in the milk house by the marketing board, equal attention should be paid to the quality of your cattle’s water source. Keep in mind that many contagious or infectious pathogens can survive in water and spread to other animals. The waterer itself can also act as a vector for disease (think respiratory viruses, pinkeye, ringworm etc). How often are your water bowls cleared of feed debris and thoroughly cleaned? In a free-stall, how often do you dump the water, scrub and refill the trough? How often are you checking the flow rate of individual waterers? OMAFRA has a detailed fact sheet including details of quality, minerals, salinity etc of drinking water for dairies.

(<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/dairy/facts/03-085.htm>)

Dairy cows have a tremendous demand for water. High producing dairy cows can consume up to 140 litres of water a day, particularly in hot weather. Water recommendations for free stalls or group housing is 10cm of linear access per cow, with two locations per pen to decrease the effect of a dominant animal.

Recommended best practices from the Dairy Code of Practice are:

- a. *have an alternative watering system in the event of an interruption in water supply*
- b. *construct and locate watering systems so that they are protected from fouling and freezing*
- c. *keep water troughs, bowls, and nipples clean and check them at least once daily to ensure they are dispensing water properly*
- d. *situate watering points at walkthrough areas (cross-over alleys)*
- e. *provide water with a depth of at least 4in (10cm) in water troughs and mount troughs at a height comfortable for the cow to drink (24-30in, 60-75 cm)*
- f. *test water quality annually and occasionally test for stray voltage.*

Dairy Code of Practice, NFACC, 2009

Watch your cows - when do the majority of cows drink? Most commonly you will find that they drink water after returning from the parlour. Can all cows from one side of your parlour drink at one time?

When evaluating a sick cow don’t forget to think about whether she can get access to water. A cow that is very lame or down will not be able to get to water and should be attended to properly.

And don’t forget about your replacements. Calves should be offered fresh water daily from day one. You would be surprised at how many can maintain hydration levels in the face of disease if they have access to clean, fresh water.