

Butterfat drives your milk price *By Jim Dickrell*

With premiums eroding across the country because of the glut of milk just about everywhere except California, focus efforts on what you still are being paid for.

It's become clear butter is back. Dairy fat has been given a clean bill of health in human diets, and butterfat has become the driver of profitability in milk checks.

Butterfat typically accounts for more than 50% of your milk check. In February, for example, the Federal Order advanced price for fat was pegged at \$2.50 per pound while protein came in at just \$1.68, nonfat solids at 52¢ and other solids at 8¢.

The good news is maintaining butterfat levels is not rocket science. In fact, maintaining rumen and cow health is synonymous with achieving both high levels of milk and butterfat production.

Although there are seasonal variations in butterfat production, feeding management, cow comfort and heat abatement in the summer go a long way in preventing or at least mitigating butterfat depression. It's pretty

simple: Keep cows eating, and they'll keep producing.

Reaching butterfat levels above 4% year-round is possible, says David Atwell, a dairy technical service consultant with Adisseo.

Good genetics is the foundation. Genetically elite Holstein herds maintain 4.0 fat/3.2 protein levels in summer and 4.3 fat/3.4 protein in winter, he says. After genetics, pay attention to feed management.

"If feed is being sorted or the cow is slug feeding, you will have a lower fat test," Atwell says.

"Cows should not be without feed for more than an hour. And feed should be pushed up four to six times daily to make sure you have feed cows can reach," he says.

Feed mixing is critical to maintaining healthy rumens and fat tests. "Train your feeder to follow your mixing routines," Atwell says.

- ✓ Ingredient addition order.
- ✓ Time mixing each ingredient.
- ✓ Time mixing after last ingredient added.
- ✓ Handling and addition of liquid ingredients.

- ✓ Processing and mixing hay and straw or hay.

- ✓ Recognizing what a good mix looks like, and as importantly, what a bad mix looks like.

- ✓ Do feeders know the feeding sequence you want?



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- ✓ Have you shared the dollars that are involved in feed, and how important feed is to the dairy's profitability?

- ✓ Do feeders understand what shrink is and how much it costs your dairy? Shrink not only includes feed losses, but whether they are feeding too much or too little of any particular ingredient.

"These are huge things that will determine how much fat and protein your cows will produce," Atwell explains. If you haven't done a TMR audit recently, consider doing one. Audits can tell if feeders are following mixing protocols and can also spot if mixers are out of adjustment or if parts are worn out, broken or missing.

Also watch pen stocking density. Stocking density above 120% of stalls negatively affects milk production. "As stocking density increases, resting time goes down, slug feeding increases and, therefore, milk and component yields decrease," Atwell says. Often, farmers find when they move cows out of crowded pens, overall milk production for the pen does not decrease and they are able to get more milk from fewer animals. What a concept. 🐄

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