

Summer's Impact Lingers Into Fall

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Summer weather in most parts of the country is a very stressful time for dairy cows. The high temperature and elevated humidity often cause cows to eat less, produce less milk, have more mastitis, and have lowered reproductive performance, among other things. When fall temperatures become cooler, most of these summer weather impacts usually disappear. However, there are some impacts that don't change or improve quickly. Rather, they can linger on for months, are costly, and require continuing management attention. Three lingering summer weather impacts that can have economic consequences are the following:

- 1) The increased incidence of both clinical and subclinical mastitis, as well as elevated herd somatic cell scores, often seen in the summer may continue for several weeks after the weather moderates in the fall. While the incidence of clinical mastitis cases may decline, subclinical mastitis cases may persist for several months, and may require treatment. The elevated herd somatic cell scores or counts that continue into the fall are a good indicator of the level of subclinical infection in the herd. Summer management practices that keep the free stall bedding clean and dry, that keep cows clean, and that cool cows can help shorten the recovery time. Following effective mastitis management and treatment programs for both dry cows and recently fresh cows should shorten the elevated somatic cell count recovery time. And don't forget about how bred heifers are managed in the summer. Summer fly control practices and keeping heifers clean and dry are important factors in keeping the udders of fall freshening heifers free of udder infections.
- 2) Lowered reproductive performance can continue for several months into the fall as the cow's reproductive system recovers from the summer heat stress. The physiologic changes that occurred in the cow due to the stressful weather must be corrected or healed, and this process can take several weeks to a few months after the weather cools. So, improvement in the conception rate may not occur until well into the fall. Following recommended practices to cool cows can reduce the lingering effects of summer heat stress, and can shorten the fall recovery time.
- 3) Cow hoof health and lameness problems that often show up in the late summer can often continue for several months into the fall. Cows standing in wet allies during the hot weather is one factor that can contribute to hoof cracks and infections, and can lead to lameness problems. This health issue will have a definite economic impact over time through reduced cow mobility, reduced feed intake, and reduced milk production.

These examples of lingering impacts of summer weather on cow health and productivity are issues that dairy producers should discuss now with their consultants so that by next summer they will have identified management practices that can be implemented to minimize the lingering impact of summer's inclement weather.