2x versus 3x milking

At present we are milking twice a day. I am wondering about milking times three 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 milk udders. When you think about 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 they move to 3x milking. Some of the speculation is less udder stress they move to 3x milking. The more times a cow is milked, the more time inflations or e-mail hoards@hoards.com. 

801, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538, P.O. Box 801, Hoard’s Dairyman. 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/ 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 inflations are on the teats. Monitor this closely to prevent undue irritation. Also, watch for extra hoof wear as walking distances go up.

— GARY SIPIOFSKI Vita Plus

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