Moos News

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"Producers and veterinarians can agree that a strong relationship is critical for success in animal health and when done right, can be rewarding for all involved."



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Do You Have a Dry-Off Plan?



From The Desk Of
Dr. Mark Jamieson

As Canadian dairy farmers continue to raise and feed cows capable of sustaining high milk production well into late lactation, having a solid dry-off plan has never been more important.

If we struggle to dry cows off today, will future cows with even higher production and more persistent lactation curves be any easier? A well-designed dry-off plan—developed and reviewed with your veterinarian—is a key opportunity to improve udder health and overall farm profitability.

Why Dry-Off Matters

Cows that are producing too much milk at dry-off are at higher risk for intramammary infections during the dry period. These infections often carry through into early lactation, impacting milk quality, treatment costs, and long-term cow health.

Ideally, cows should be producing less than 20 L/day at dry-off. Newer research suggests that reaching 18 L or even 15 L/day is even better for significantly reducing mastitis risk.

Dry-Off Strategies: What Works Best?

There are several approaches to drying cows off, but they vary in effectiveness:

- Abrupt dry-off (not recommended unless cows are already low-producing)
- Intermittent milking
- Decreasing dietary energy
- **Intermittent milking combined with decreased energy intake** (recommended – effects are additive)
- Dry-off boluses

Questions to Ask About Your Current Dry-Off Program

- Do you have a target milk level for dry-off?
- What percentage of cows actually reach that target?
- What is your plan for cows still milking 20 L or more at their scheduled dry-off date?
- Do you review records to see how well your dry-off program is performing?

Nutrition and Milking Management

Reducing milking frequency and lowering dietary energy should be done together for best results.

Tie-stall or parlour herds

- How do you ensure cows being milked less frequently are also on a lower plane of nutrition?
- Can these cows be fed separately?
- Remember: a lactating cow TMR is not appropriate for cows being dried-off.

Automated milking systems

- Have you recently reviewed milk access and feed tables?
- Can you reduce the amount of expensive robot pellet more aggressively to reduce milk yield quickly without causing issues?
- Your AMS service provider or veterinarian can help fine-tune these settings.

Facilities Matter

A pen specifically designed for cows in the process of going dry should be a serious consideration for new barn builds or retrofits.

Hygiene Is Critical

Dry-off hygiene plays a major role in preventing new infections:

- Incorrectly applied teat sealant or poor keratin plug formation can leave teat ends vulnerable.
- Are dry cows moving into a clean, dry pen?
- This is especially important for cows not receiving teat sealant or those still milking heavily and at risk of leaking.

Monitor After Dry-Off

- Check cows for mastitis or milk leakage in the days following dry-off.
- Some cows leak for several days, and some never form complete keratin plugs.

Other Important Considerations

- Body condition scoring at dry-off and fresh check is a valuable tool for monitoring health and fertility. Two measurements allow you to determine how much body condition is lost during their transition.
- Cull cows should be included in your dry-off plan. Thin cull cows may be dried-off and stay on a lactating cow ration to gain condition for a few weeks before slaughter.
- Be mindful that cull cows may be in transit for up to a week after leaving the farm.
- Newer products such as Bovicalk-Dry can help cows still milking heavily; research shows they may reduce milk production by ~10%.
- If using different or new dry cow antibiotics (e.g., Tomorrow), ensure milk and meat withholds are accurately recorded.

We're Here to Help

At Milverton-Wellesley Vets, our goal is to help prevent mastitis so you can keep good cows in your herd and keep milk in the tank. If you'd like to review or fine-tune your dry-off program, talk to your veterinarian—we're happy to help.



Welcome Jaclyn!

We are excited to welcome Jaclyn Van Aarsen to our reception team. Jaclyn has spent the last 4 years mainly focused on raising her two young boys (ages 6 & 8). She also enjoys caring for her family's collection of animals including 2 horses, 1 donkey, 2 dogs and 3 cats. Her previous work experience over the years has consisted mostly of administration positions, however, her passion has always been with horses and the Equine Industry.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

MAY YOUR HARD WORK THIS YEAR YIELD ABUNDANT HARVESTS AND JOY.