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## APRIL 2024 DAIRY NEWSLETTER

### Update On Avian Flu H5N1

Dr Robyn did a summary in the March newsletter regarding signs both individually and herd based to look for as we continue to monitor for any infections on this side of the border. Please take a look online to review those points, here are a few more details that have become available.

#### Other individual signs

Some cows may have thick, colostrum-like milk that does not gel on CMT and changes in manure consistency including pasty or diarrhea. Less consistent signs include: lesions on vulvas; high temperatures; respiratory distress; a drop in feed consumption; and a corresponding lack of rumination. These individual signs do not really add up to winter dysentery signs for the herd even when indigestion may be the first and more prevalent sign.

#### Testing options

Composite milk samples and properly collected and transported nasal swabs can be used to test clinically affected animals with CFIA covering the costs. There have been updates to export of animals to the USA and if you have animals destined for export, please speak with one of us for more details.

#### Good News

This disease has been relatively slow to spread and has not shown up in the food chain through extensive testing of milk and ground beef in the US.

Continue to monitor your herd for any individuals that are 'off' and herd performance levels. We will keep you informed with any changes as they arise.

#### The Importance of Sugar for Your Cow

We are all aware of how sugar is the enemy for many human dieticians and fad diet promoters online. And when your weight goes off the rails there's always Ozempic! If you were raised in a dessert based family you'll know it is hard to kick the cycle. When a fad diet is critical of fruits and other natural foods for containing sugar they absolutely miss the boat on the other health benefits that those products contain. Complex carbohydrates are important, and when presented in an unrefined form they provide an excellent source of energy for the microbiome. As cows have a giant microbiology lab going on in their rumen it is paramount to give them the diet needed to promote function of that organ. We are always feeding the bugs and letting them do the work, which is eat things and make more bugs. And when we do this with a high percentage forage diet we can have full rumen cows with ample cudging to make components and milk. When we have poor quality forages we need to supplement more to make up the gap between bug needs for peak performance that turns into cow peak performance. So where this matters this time of year is in germination and then quickly followed by harvest technique in winter grass or your first cut of alfalfa.

Last year with more cloud cover we missed out on sunshine and drying conditions. We had healthy cows, but they didn't perform quite as well as in the past. Several producers experimented with adding sugar to the diet and things did get better, both in milk and components. The bugs need sugar and the best way to get that is to have it in the forage. We often cut early to achieve a higher protein, saving on the most expensive supplement but sometimes we are sacrificing rumen performance to do that. When the forage sticks around in the rumen a bit longer the bugs have more time to digest it and when the harvest technique promotes the highest retention (or accumulation) of sugar in the plant it is more digestible. Feeding bugs digestible forage and having them make more bugs is the cheapest form of protein you can have on the farm, because all bugs eventually get eaten by the abomasum.

The cow needs glucose to make milk as well as the energy demand for immune function. There is a high cost to running the immune system in the background and producers that have reduced transition cow risks have enjoyed higher milk production because of it. Not only from having the rumen ready to perform for production, but they have reduced the drag of the immune system stealing energy away to combat small (or large) insults.

So, as we approach the fury of manure out, planting and harvesting it is important to find a balance in maturation and harvest technique to feed the rumen.

Hope we get loads of sunshine!!