

Forage Facts

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When it Comes to Milking, More is Not Always Better

By: Johanna Murray

In years like this one, where access to quality feed is limited, chances are you've started to notice the less efficient animals in your herd. You might be writing some of them down to send to town, but others might be getting a pass because they're sick, or because of their milking ability. However, when it comes to efficiency, it may be worth it to pay attention to those heavy milkers in your herd.

According to research from the National Research Council (United States) a cow producing 25 lb of milk/day can require 10 % more feed energy than a cow that produced 15lbs of milk/day; meaning that you might as well be feeding a 1,300lb cow rather than a 1,100lb cow. In terms of the beef nutrition rules of thumb, an average milk production cow needs 65% TDN when she is at peak lactation, whereas a high production cow requires 75%

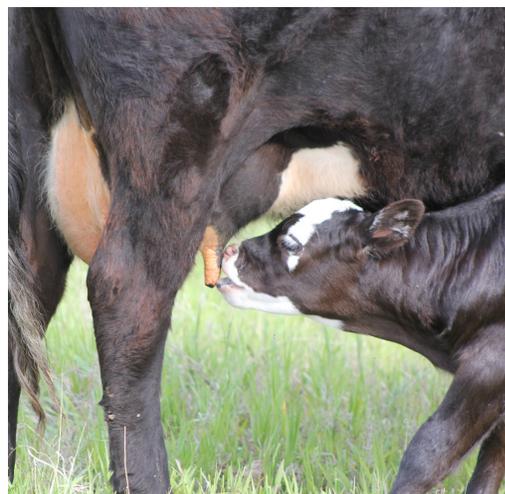


Photo: University of Nebraska

TDN. (beefmagazine.com/americancowman/pasture-and-range/matching_milk_production_and_cow_size_resources_1209.) High milk production can also increase the incidence of udder infections and issues like mastitis since the cows are producing much more milk than the calf can consume.

Despite the issues, more milk may seem worth it if those high production cows bring in heavier calves in the fall. But a University of Nebraska study seems to indicate the opposite. Calves from high production cows are unlikely to have higher weaning weights, while the calves off low to moderate production cows

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Managing Heavy Milking Cows

are more feed efficient. The lower production pairs are also more efficient on the financial side, likely because cows producing less milk need less feed.

The disparity between milk production and weaning weights might be explained by feed quality as a limiting factor. A study in Oklahoma revealed that cows with a high milking ability actually give less milk than moderate milkers as forage decreases in quality. The extra 10% feed energy required by the higher production animals can be hard to come by when the year is less than ideal, meaning you should be carefully selecting for a milking ability that matches your environment. (progressivecattle.com/topics/reproduction/milk-the-double-edged-sword-of-the-beef-cow-herd)

None of this is to say that you should reduce your herd's milking ability indiscriminately. A calf needs 10% of its body weight in milk per day, to perform. But as long as your cows are producing enough milk to feed their calves, increasing milk production might be more detrimental than helpful to your operation's margins.

A note on nutrition; whether your cows are high producers, average produc-

ers, or low producers, the fact remains that they hit their highest nutrition requirements 6 – 8 weeks after calving. The cow is healing from calving, she's reaching peak lactation, and chances are you want her to start cycling as soon as possible so you can get another calf next year.

If you're a later calver, starting closer to May, chances are your animals are hitting their peak requirements about the same time the grass is at its highest production (late June/early July). Aside from minerals, you likely won't have many nutritional concerns with lactating cows out on pasture. However, if you're calving earlier and eyeing up that dormant grass left over from your fall grazing, you should get it tested before turning the pairs out. Dormant pasture generally doesn't contain the nutrients that lactating cattle require. (See the article from March this year on stockpiled forages for more information on management)

When in doubt: a call to your local PCBFA office to balance your ration, can give you a better idea of where you're at in terms of nutrition for your lactating cattle.

Gestation	Crude Protein (CP)	Energy (TDN)
Mid-Gestation	7%	55%
Late Gestation	9%	60%
Lactation	11%	65%
Dry Matter Intake = 2.5 – 2.7% of Body Weight		
Ca:P = 2:1 – 7:1		

Beef Ration Rules of Thumb. Values are an average measure for an average cow.

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Welcome to Our New PCBFA Directors!



Dan Martin, Director South West

Dan Martin is a new board member of PCBFA. He lives in Bay Tree, Alberta, and is pastor at Bay Tree Mennonite Church. He is passionate about his faith and family, regenerative agriculture, and a holistic approach to livestock and grain production.

Dan's interest in PCBFA includes an appreciation for the research and data made available, the conferences and farm tours that they sponsor, and their focus on promoting a holistic approach to agriculture, reducing input costs, use of cover crops, etc.

Dan and his family operate a ranch of about 2000 acres and run 200 cow/calf pairs. An most importantly, he grills a mighty fine steak!



Michael Strebchuk, Director South East

Michael Strebchuk farms with his family west of High Prairie. They are organic, and are third generation farmers.

Michael started farming with his parents in 1997 and in 2001 married his wife Michelle. In 2007 they took over the family farm. They were certified organic in 2008 and were growing organically for 10 years prior to that.

Michael & Michelle have been members of PCBFA for many years now and have attended many workshops and field days. Michael is excited to be on the board and to help in any way he is able. He has decades of experience on boards and community organizations and look forward to meeting the challenges that this new opportunity presents.

MacKay Ross, Director at Large

MacKay Ross, along with his wife, Jeanne, and son Alex, farm with the cooperation of his parents Lloyd and Donna Ross in the Cleardale area. MacKay is the 3rd generation on their farm.

MacKay grew up on his parents farm, they grain farmed and had cattle, the grain farming didn't survive the recession in the mid '80s but our farm did thanks to the cattle. He was a partner in Clear River Red Angus from 1988 until 2016. In 2003 MacKay had the privilege of being appointed to the Clear Hills County Ag Service Board. This opened up significant opportunities to learn about many aspects of agriculture he wouldn't normally be exposed to.

The drought in 2015 forced the farm to adopt planned grazing mid summer on a field of oats that physically showed me the potential that a hour a day can give in plant utilization. In 2016, M JJ & A Organic Farm was born. Since 2017 we have custom grazed and produced Organic crops (peas and oats) but our farming journey feels like it has only begun. The year over year improvements in our forage and soil have been encouraging and we can't wait to see what improvements we can incorporate into our farm next. I am looking forward to my increased involvement with PCBFA that will come with my directorship and will push for more soil growth and improving the net income for farmers that PCBFA works on daily.





Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Location
Organic No-Till Webinar Series Part 2: The Inspection Process	April 3rd @ Noon	Online
Organic No-Till Webinar Series Part 3: Strategies to Reduce Tillage in an Organic System	April 10th @ Noon	Online
Organic No-Till Webinar Series Part 4: Integrating Livestock	April 17th @ Noon	Online
Organic No-Till Webinar Series Part 5: Producer Panel	April 24th @ Noon	Online

**For More Information or to Register for any of these Events,
Visit peacecountrybeef.ca/upcoming-events
Email info@pcbfa.ca or Call 780-835-6799 ext. 3**



Please Note:
PCBFA Staff are
Currently Working
Remotely

PLEASE SEE OUR CONTACT
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Connect with Us!

Chelsey Hostettler Interim General Manager Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 780-523-0443 E: chelsey@pcbfa.ca	Akim Omokanye Research Coordinator Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 780-835-1112 E: akim@pcbfa.ca	Buthaina Al-Maquarti Research Technician Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 E: buthaina@pcbfa.ca	Katie McLachlan Environmental & Communications Coordinator Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 780-772-0277 E: katie@pcbfa.ca	Johanna Murray Extension Coordinator High Prairie, AB P: 780-523-4033 E: johanna@pcbfa.ca	Marianne Krahn Administrative Assistant High Prairie, AB P: 780-523-4033 E: marianne@pcbfa.ca
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