

ACIDOSIS: RISKY BUSINESS
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As all dairymen know, acidosis can be a significant health and economic problem. Buffers are often fed as an insurance factor to prevent the occurrence of acidosis. But the question arises as to the incidence of acidosis if the buffer is removed. A recent article published in the Journal of Dairy Science¹ addressed this question.

Data on 61,124 cows was analyzed for the incidence of acidosis. Only confirmed veterinary diagnosis were used, on farm diagnosis by the dairymen were not considered. The authors found the occurrence of acidosis was not related to the number of calves that the cow had produced, and not directly related to calving. The risk of a cow having acidosis was found to increase with milk yield and was highest in the first few months after calving. This may be due to the increased feeding of high concentrate rations post calving to insure maximum milk yield. These high concentrate rations may predispose the cows to acidosis.

Acidosis was also found to have significant seasonal variation, with the lowest risk being in summer. The lower risk in the summer may be due to the increased use of pasture. Conditions that were found to be risk factors for the occurrence of acidosis were milk fever, ketosis and acute or chronic mastitis.

Although risk factors do not insure that a cow will get acidosis, they should be considered when balancing rations and the inclusion of additives. The authors conclude "Based on this study, if a cow has ketosis, the farmer or the veterinarian should watch her carefully for signs of ruminal acidosis or consider adding buffers to her ration."

This study, as well as field observations, indicate that feeding buffers to high producing cows may limit the incidence of acidosis and related health problems.

¹ Effect of Diseases, Production and Season on Traumatic Reticuloperitonitis and Ruminal Acidosis in Dairy Cattle; Y.T. Grohn and M.L. Bruss. Journal of Dairy Science 1990, 73:2355-63.