Feeding the Dairy Cows the Entire Year.

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Being requested against my wishes by the secretary of the Southern Wisconsin Cheesemakers' Association to give my ways and methods of feeding and taking care of dairy cows the entire year I will endeavor to accomplish it the best I can and know how.

In order to do this I will have to begin in the spring of the year and finish where I began. In the spring, about the middle of May, or about the time grass is somewhat started, we turn the cows on pasture but not before we feel safe of having grass enough. The first eight or ten days we still feed some of the very best hay and some ground feed, as I consider a sudden change from dry feed to grass dangerous. As soon as they have been on pasture a few days we also turn them out evenings but don’t like to before it stops frosty grass in the spring more damaging than in the fall. As our pasture is of a redtop nature and gives out early in the fall so about August we have plenty of green corn to feed which we feed according to shortage of pasture about four shocks twelve by twelve to the cows giving milk. For about 80 to 100 head the feeding is as follows: Feed is taken into the night pasture so that they don’t see or know how it got there, by so doing we avoid all bellowing and running after teams and wagons, besides it is the quickest and easiest way to handle green corn. We keep this up until frost kills the corn, then we generally feed shock corn as long as it’s dry and not too cold to keep them out nights, about the latter part of October or beginning of November, as I think it is still a long time to keep them confined to the stables until spring.

When pastures begin to give out in about October or so I also begin to feed in the morning the best of hay and some ground feed or other heavy feed as corn and oats, one sack to about 15 cows, if bran, or ground wheat screenings one sack to 10 or 12 cows. Of course this feeding has to be governed according to weather and pastures. About the middle of November we generally stable and yard the cows
for good day and night as I think it is detrimental for cows to run on frozen ground and eat frozen feed and they feed better and are more satisfied. When kept up we will begin on winter feeding and winter care which is done as follows: The first thing in the morning is the milking, which is about 5 o’clock. The reason for milking first, is that they will stand quieter when they have no feed and milk better. After we are through milking we give them one good mess of hay, not all they will eat, but what I consider a fair mess. After this hay is all eaten they get one sack of some ground feed, one sack to about 15 head, also sprinkle some stock-food over this feed. About 9 o’clock or so according to the weather they are turned out and get 4 shocks of ear corn and husked corn fodder or some straw. Between times they go to the tank for water of which we always have a plenty well tempered and clean. By so doing there is no danger of taking too much water at one time as every animal will hurry back to the feed.

Cows that are milked during the winter are not allowed to be out any length of time unless the weather is very nice and warm. They are fed a little hay and one sack of bran or other ground feed, 1 sack to about 10 or 12 head. In the evening they are again watered. During the time the stables are cleaned and bedded and feed put in readiness for the night, which as a rule is shredded fodder so that what they do not eat during the night is used the next morning for bedding. As a rule unless the weather is very nice and warm they are stabled about 3 o’clock but if stormy and disagreeable, sooner. The feeding in the evening I govern according to the weather. If it is cold I feed heavier but if warm less, as a cow should not get thirsty in the night when there is no water. If they get thirsty during the night they have no appetite in the morning. I always like to see them reach for feed and show an appetite. There is danger of overfeeding in the evening, especially when the weather is warm, so this method or rule is kept as closely as possible until they get on pasture again.

The milking as near as possible is commenced at 5 in the morning and 5 in the evening the year round, and with as little excitement, noise, talking and singing as possible, as
one cannot talk, sing and milk at the same time. Evenings our cows come home or start towards home and we have no trouble in getting them. Mornings they are stirred up at 4 or half past four and as a rule need no dogging. Those that stray to the farthest end of the pasture may as well be left there because it only stirs us an excitement among all by dogging or running those that work away from home. We are well supplied with water both in the yards and in the pasture.

We also have the young cattle and dry cows separate from the milkers, by so doing we avoid disturbances of different kinds among the milk cows. They also have access to salt the year around as they wish. You no doubt have noticed that I stated previously that I feed ground feed to all my cows whether dry or giving milk. I also sprinkle some stock food over this feed. The reason for doing this is because we lost about 50 calves on the so-called white scowers the last year. The calves were apparently well, drank or sucked for two or three days or even longer, but suddenly would show symptoms of disease, have a swollen leg or joint and sometimes lose the end of one leg or the entire leg and in every case death would ensue. I found by examination that those swollen parts were full of thick yellowish stuff. Some were affected on the liver, others on the kidneys, still others on the bowels, in fact the entire insides was affected and looked feverish, sick and wrong. We tried everything available without success. Finally we called on Veterinary Roub. He said he knew what was the matter, but that they were up against the disease, and that the only way to prevent the same was to feed the cows some brand of medicine or reliable stock food. He also claimed that it came under the head of abortion but that the cow was too strong to abort if in perfect health.

I also have spoken of raising feed corn and I wish to tell my farmer friends how I do this. I plant same with an ordinary check row planter only I straddle the rows again, by so doing I raise twice the amount of feed and can work this corn both ways with horses. I think this far ahead of drilling as in drilled corn you will get weeds in between rows which you can’t destroy only with haying which is too expensive at the present wages.