



Have you found a sweet spot for transitioning cows from a fresh diet to a lactating diet?

When it comes to the transition period, I'm like a sponge. I am always on the lookout trying to soak up new information about transition cow nutrition and ways to reduce stress. An article titled "How long do cows need in the fresh pen?" by Emily Bourdeau caught my eye in the September 2023 edition of the Miner Institute's *Farm Report*.

Many producers have a designated fresh cow pen to help monitor health problems, to provide a diet specifically formulated for just-fresh cows and to minimize negative social interactions with other cows. But what is the optimal amount of time a cow should stay in this pen? Here are 6 takeaways from Bourdeau's article that may help you answer that question on your specific dairy operation:

1. Having a designated fresh pen has benefits, but the length cows stay in the fresh pen varies significantly by farm and typically ranges from 10-30+ DIM.
2. Cows that have a smooth transition will be ready to consume a more fermentable diet than your typical fresh cow ration by 10-14 DIM, so if they stay too long, they will be at a higher risk for ketosis.
3. A Michigan State transition cow study fed treatment diets to fresh cows from 0-28 DIM and then a common lactating diet from 29-84 DIM. On the fresh treatment diets (forage NDF 27%), the cows DMI was 45 lbs/d or less, while DMI increased to a least 50 lbs/d on the lactating diet (forage NDF 20%). They concluded that DMI was likely limited by forage NDF for cows between 10-28 DIM. The gut-filling effect of the higher forage NDF can serve to limit DMI and cause a prolonged period of negative energy balance as milk production rapidly increases.
4. Another study from 2020 looked at the effects of adding straw to early lactation diets and found that those cows had lower DMI and elevated BHBA concentrations, especially on days 14 and 17 after calving.
5. A 2023 study examined fresh cow grouping strategies and saw that cows who spent 14 vs 21 days on the fresh cow diet produced 5 lbs/d more milk at 15 DIM, 10 lbs/d more milk at 30 DIM, and 8 lbs/d more milk at 60 DIM. The study concluded this difference was due to the cows that only spent 14 days on the fresh cow diet having earlier access to a more fermentable, less filling diet. Those cows also produced more fat-corrected milk and milk fat.
6. Another study saw cows that only spent 10 days in the fresh pen produced more milk in early lactation and had overall higher milk production throughout the 305-d lactation.

I'm curious, have you looked at keeping cows in the fresh pen for different lengths of time? Have you found a sweet spot for transitioning cows from a fresh diet to a lactating diet? I would love to hear your thoughts and experiences. Email me at kortega@jefo.com.

For more details, you can find the full article on page 3 at this link: https://assets.website-files.com/5ff4d81b37f88b4753e0f224/65047a63a9d3d0459e959359_09-23.pdf