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Physiological Response to Heat Stress and its Nutritional Management in Dairy Animals

Prasanth M. Nair [1], Anil [1,2], Parul Chaudhary [1], Amit Kumar Singh [1,3]*, Veena Mani[1], Goutam Mondal[1]

[1] ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal, Haryana, India Present address: 2 Veterinary Officer, Governement of Karnatka

[3] Subject Matter Specialist (Animal Husbandry), ICAR- Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Amihit, Jaunpur 2, Uttar Pradesh- 222142

Abstract

Dairy animals are a valuable resource for the global food industry, and the production of milk and milk products is an essential component of the agriculture sector. However, heat stress is a major challenge in dairy production, particularly in countries with hot and humid climates. Heat stress develops when the ambient temperature rises above the thermoneutral zone of the animal, causing physiological and metabolic changes that may have an impact on the animal's well-being, productivity, and reproductive efficiency. The physiological reaction to heat stress in dairy animals will be covered in this article, along with the nutritional management tactics that can lessen its effects.

Heat Stress Biological Reaction

Dairy animals are affected by heat stress because it disturbs their heat balance, which is the equilibrium between heat production and heat loss. In response to high environmental temperatures, dairy animals undergo a series of physiological changes to maintain their core body temperature, such as increased respiration rate, sweating, and panting. These changes increase the animal's energy expenditure, leading to a decrease in feed intake and nutrient digestibility, which can affect their production and health.

Moreover, heat stress can cause oxidative stress and inflammation in dairy animals, leading to a variety of health issues such as reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to infections, and metabolic diseases including hyperlipidemia and ketosis. Heat stress can also impair reproductive performance by reducing fertility, increasing embryonic mortality, and decreasing milk production during the early stages of lactation.

Nutritional Management Strategies for Heat Stress

1. A key component of reducing the effects of heat stress on dairy cattle is nutritional management. By supplying sufficient energy and nutrients to fulfil the animal's increased demands during heat stress, proper nutrition can assist sustain the animal's health and productivity. Some dietary management techniques that can be utilised to lessen the impacts of heat stress in dairy animals include the following:

2. Provide Adequate Water: Dairy animals lose a significant amount of water through sweating and panting during heat stress. Therefore, it is essential to provide an adequate supply of clean and fresh water to prevent dehydration and maintain electrolyte balance.

3. Adjust Feed Composition: Feeding a balanced diet with an appropriate nutrient composition is essential during heat stress. The diet should be adjusted to provide more digestible energy and protein, as well as an adequate supply of essential vitamins and minerals. Feeding high-quality forages, such as alfalfa and clover, can also help maintain rumen function and prevent acidosis.

4. Supplementation with Antioxidants: Heat stress can cause oxidative stress in dairy animals, leading to cellular damage and impaired health. Supplementation with antioxidants such as vitamin E and selenium can help alleviate the effects of oxidative stress and improve immune function.

5. Management of Heat Load: Management practices such as providing shade, sprinklers, and fans can help reduce the animal's heat load and increase heat dissipation. Additionally, avoiding high-stress activities such as handling and transportation during the hottest parts of the day can also help reduce the animal's heat load.

6. Utilization of Feed Additives: It has been demonstrated that the use of feed additives, such as yeast culture, direct-fed microbials, and rumen-protected amino acids, improves nutrient consumption and keeps the rumen functioning under heat stress. These additives can aid in enhancing feed intake, nutrient absorption, and metabolic balance in animals.

7. Genetic Selection: Genetic selection for heat tolerance is an emerging strategy to improve dairy animal's resilience to heat stress. Heat tolerance is a complex trait, and its genetic basis is not yet fully understood. However, research has shown that certain genetic markers associated with heat tolerance can be used to select animals with improved heat tolerance.

Environmental aspects including air temperature, humidity, and sun radiation can also make dairy animals more susceptible to the negative consequences of heat stress. To reduce the animal's exposure to heat stress, it is crucial to monitor and control these parameters. Regular health monitoring, such as body condition score, metabolic profiling, and reproductive performance, can also aid in identifying and treating health problems brought on by heat stress.

In conclusion, heat stress is a significant challenge in dairy production, affecting animal health, productivity, and reproductive performance. Nutritional management strategies, such as providing adequate water, adjusting feed composition, supplementation with antioxidants, managing heat load, use of feed additives, and genetic selection, can help mitigate the effects of heat stress in dairy animals. Proper management practices, such as monitoring environmental factors, health monitoring, and avoiding high-stress activities during the hottest parts of the day, are essential to maintain animal health and productivity in the face of heat stress. Implementing these strategies can help improve dairy animal welfare and contribute to sustainable dairy production.

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