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Impact of High-Protein Diets on Reproductive Function in Dairy Animals

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the effect and influence of diets rich in protein on reproductive system of dairy animals, highlighting the critical balance required between dietary protein intake and reproductive performance. Including both protein rumen degradable protein (RDP) and rumen undegradable protein (RUP) are necessary for production of milk, growth and overall metabolic functions. However, when more than required protein especially RDP is fed to animal it can affect the reproductive efficiency by increasing blood urea and ammonia levels. Especially in high lactating dairy cows, metabolites can cause hormonal balance disruption, reduction of uterine pH, impairing ovarian functions, development of embryo, and conception rates. This article also explores the mechanism in which byproducts of protein metabolism interfere with axis of hypophseal-pituitary-ovarian, ovulation and uterine environment. It further discusses the roles of microbial protein synthesis, amino acid digestibility, and the importance of energy-protein balance. It highlights the strategies for optimizing the dietary protein while reducing reproductive harms such as using alternative protein sources and formulating rations according to the NRC recommendation. Ensuring proper protein management is essential for improving fertility, sustaining high milk yields, and achieving long-term profitability in modern dairy farming.

Keywords: High-protein diet, Reproductive efficiency, Dairy cows, Rumen degradable protein (RDP), Urea nitrogen, Embryo development

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Introduction

The goal was to generate profit from the first day of farming. In that case better reproductive efficiency and structure play important role in successful production. As reproductive efficiency is directly related to the milk production which is important factor for economic cycle of farm (1). Furthermore, the milk produce is used to generate revenue to cover the expenditure of farming. So farm should necessarily ensure the reproductive health of all animals in the farm. Additionally, to ensure the proper reproductive cycle, farmer must focus on several activities i-e monitoring for timely estrous cycle, maintaining reproductive health of all animals, in case of natural breeding bull breeding soundness must have done, in case of artificial insemination the bull semen selected must be of high quality, separate and suitable environment for the animals to breed etc. By working on these points the farmer would successfully obtain more than 70% reproductive efficiency (2).

Faulty feeding management and preparation, some specific deficiencies or toxicities or conditioned deficiency or periparturient disorder that are of increased risk with association of nutritional factor are cause of nutritional effect on fertility in dairy herd. Excessive body condition during calving and effect on overall health are included in conditioned deficiencies. Nevertheless, in both lactating and non-lactating (growing or dry) cow diet, nutritional problems may occur. To overcome reproductive failure, herdsman must work on systematic analysis of reproductive record (3). Diagnostic ruleouts suggest Nutritional Etiology of more likely causes. However, to diagnose a herd problem alone feeds proximate analysis, evaluation of ration even necessary for diagnosis but still not sufficient. In order to determine the cause of nutritional affect on reproductive failure in dairy herd, the practitioner must align performance of herd with related test of diagnosis and on tissue specimen and feed samples (4).

Problems associated with nutrition can be both primary and secondary. An absolute deficiency or excess of particular nutrients may cause problems included as primary and these nutrients include like selenium. Although, various factors can be the cause of nutritional deficiency including diet too (5). Factor like Interaction of nutrients, health condition that are underlying, effects of medicine, genetic factor or stress, feeds that are process improperly can be the cause of these type of deficiencies. The immune function can be weakening by imbalances of nutrition which can affect fertility with increase of disease risk. So, diagnosing diet with addition of accurate diagnosing feed management and other potential causes of health problem is necessary. Goiter can mostly be the pointing cause of nutritional issue but is required to complete comprehensive approach (6).

Protein is required by lactating cows for the purpose of milk production and maintenance, with microbial protein as a source of most amino acids that is produced in rumen. This microbial protein is highly digestible and of superior quality. For the reason of lowering need of costly protein supplements, microbial growth is promoted by formulating diet, which results in optimizing production (7). Additional amino acids are provided in result of dietary protein that escapes from rumen degradation and instead are digested in abomasums. The protein is complemented by this bypass protein or undegradable protein (RUP) and used b rumen microbes (RDP). Through microbial protein synthesis, non-protein nitrogen or low quality protein sources are efficiently utilized by ruminants to meet their amino acid needs (8).

The optimal protein intake is determined by these factors necessary for cow's health and productivity. Although, protein is mainly involved in metabolic function support and ensuring optimal milk production in dairy cow's nutrition. Understanding requirement of crude protein requirement, dietary protein sources and utilization of nitrogen aids farmer to easily formulate balanced diets through which cow meets its protein need, enhancing their health and performance and most necessary dairy farming operation are performed well. Protein in nutrition is hence prioritized for attaining success in modern dairy farming

Protein requirement of diary animals

Functions like growth, lactation and reproduction require amino acids for building protein in dairy animal's body. Both undegradable protein (RUP) which animals metabolize directly while passing through rumen and Rumen degradable protein (RDP) that rumen microbes utilize, are provided by dietary crude protein (9). As a top amino acid source for ruminants, rumen microbial protein often surpasses RUP and is rich in amino acids. Additionally, adequate supplies of nitrogen, carbohydrate, vitamins, minerals along with amino acids, peptides and non-protein nitrogen that are the source of nitrogen are the factors on which microbial protein synthesis depends (10).

Cost and environmental impact can be lowered by reducing the amount of crude protein in dairy diets. Optimizing dietary protein concentrations to the nutritional requirements of animals reduces emissions and decreases soil nitrate and therefore leaching. However, by matching dietary protein to the nutritional needs of animal, leaching, soil nitrate, and emission can be reduced (11).

Table 1: shows the crude protein requirement (%) by cow during different stages of lactation

Milk production	Crude protein requirement (%)
Early Lactation	16-18
Mid Lactation	14-16
Late Lactation	12-16
Dry	10-12

Crude protein, undegradable dietary protein or rumen degradable protein can be utilized while calculating the protein requirement of dairy herds. The exact amount of rumen degradable protein or undegradable dietary protein requirement cannot be calculated instead only estimated (12). However, the cow itself and rumen microbe's protein requirement are taken into account, in order to calculate the essential requirement of rumen degradable protein or undegradable protein. Calculation is required for the microbial protein amount that is made available after being flushed from rumen (13).

Effect of high protein intake on Fertility and Embryo Development

Worsening of negative energy balance decreased plasma progesterone levels are the mechanism from which reduced fertility may result when high level of ruminally degradable protein are given to cows. Embryos can also be harmed by altered uterine secretion due to high protein intake and elevated plasma urea nitrogen (14). Altered pH gradients and more notably increased secretion of prostaglandin F2α (PGF2α) are the response by endometrial cells of bovine in culture. Plausible link between high plasma urea nitrogen and decreased fertility is provided by elevated PGF2α in uterine lumen when interfere with embryo development and survival (15). However, the poor fertility in high producing cows can also be caused to the combined effect of progesterone dependent uterine environment comprised by negative energy balance, problems of postpartum health and worsened by urea from high dietary protein intake (16).

Follicular development leading to ovulation, fertilization of the oocyte, embryo transport and development, maternal recognition, and implantation are few coordinated sequence of interconnected events that encompass all tissue of reproductive tract that involved in conception and establishing pregnancy in dairy cows. Theoretically, Reproductive efficiency is compromised by ammonia, urea, or other toxic byproducts of protein metabolism when interfere with one or more of these steps (17).

The effect of high protein intake on early embryo development in dairy cows has been studied by researchers. Poor development of embryos and its degeneration was observed at early stage in cows that are in lactating stage and fed with excess RDP (18). While a similar test was done on non-lactating cows and the observation shows that embryo number and quality is not affected by the high Crude Protein intake. Nutritional, metabolic or energy balance factor may be worsen by the raising dietary protein level and its degradability in lactating cows according to the studies that shows energy status varied greatly between non-lactating and lactating cows, that may results in increased reproductive failure which also include impaired embryo growth. Also the greater embryo loss is observed in heifer on energy restricted diets with high degradable protein (19). During breeding phase, health of follicle is may also harmed before ovulation due to the negative energy balance early after calving that may have lasting impact for follicular growth over 40 to 60 days. So, the reduced embryo quality seen in lactating cows is the contributed result of interaction between high RDP intake and poor energy status (20).

Impact of high protein on lactating cows

Lactating cows require a significant amount of metabolizable amino acids to produce milk protein. In the total of dry matters, the diet contains level of crude protein ranging from 16-18%. Rumen microbial activity and fermentation can be hindered by the diets low in crude protein that can result in less milk production and reduced feed intake (21). The decreased fertility is indicated by the elevation of ammonia and urea level in milk, which is linked with the feeding more protein than required to dairy cows. The stem from the changes in uterine function is considered the drop in fertility due to high intake of protein; also the reduction in uterine pH in early luteal phase of estrous cycle is noticed (22). A more acidic uterine environment is less favorable for maintaining pregnancy in cattle. Therefore, to the early embryo development stage, the negative impact appears limited. When diets are moderately rich in crude protein and balanced for metabolizable protein and key amino acids, high yielding lactating cows utilize protein more effectively and also there is no rational for feeding the protein levels that elevates urea N and impair fertility (23).

On nutritionally poor roughages and crop residue, many livestock survive in developing countries. Their extremely low content of digestible crude protein is the major limitation of these feeds. For the fetal development and normal functioning of reproductive organs, protein is very essential (24). Additionally, delay puberty, reduce embryo survival, hinder development of embryo in both cows and sheep, the occurrence of silent estrous, lowering conception rates, even lead to cessation of estrous cycle can be caused by the deficiency in protein. The body condition loss and reduce milk yield is caused by the protein deficiency in lactating cows. Sperm concentration is also lowered by it in bulls. Excessive protein intake can disrupt hormonal regulation and increase blood urea levels, which may be toxic to sperm, ova, and developing embryos (25).

Diets rich in protein are required to feed to high producing cow to support peak lactation. Predicting the precise amino acids balance from diet composition is quite challenging because diets contain slightly more protein than require. But the harmful effect of urea and ammonia on fertility can be reduce by formulating ration carefully according to NRC recommendations for RDP, RUP, and energy density as it can help reduce urea and ammonia levels in the uterus and ovaries (26).

Conclusion

Protein as a nutrition play crucial role in obtaining growth, milk production and reproductive function in dairy animals. However, some acts like blood urea and ammonia level uprising, disruption of hormonal regulation, lowering of uterine pH and impairing of embryo survival can occur due to the excessive intake of protein, especially rumen degradable protein (RDP). In situation, where the combined challenges of negative energy balance and protein metabolism byproducts compromise conception rates and overall fertility, these effects are more evident in high-producing lactating cows.

Protein feeding must be precisely balanced, to lessen these risks. It is essential that both protein i-e rumen degradable protein (RDP) and rumen undegradable protein (RUP) must be rightly integrated according to animal's stage of lactation and energy status. While supporting productivity, reproductive outcomes can be improved by following NRC recommendations, monitoring milk and plasma urea nitrogen and adopting alternative protein sources with lower environmental footprints.

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