

Valacta

Dairy Production Centre of Expertise
Quebec-Atlantic

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How do you group your cows for maximum benefit?

In order to adequately answer the needs of your high-producing cows while avoiding overfeeding the cows that produce less, appropriate grouping is crucial. Good grouping also allows you to maximize your feeding margin. What criteria should you consider in establishing your groups? Is it really worth the effort?

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Nutritional requirements are not the same for all cows. Feed requirements vary according to milk production (yield

and composition) as well as the cow's growth stage and body condition. Cows are

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often grouped together according to their stage of lactation, for instance, with all cows within 150 days in milk (DIM) placed in Group 1 and the others relegated to Group 2. Unfortunately, this strategy has two main flaws:

- Even if calving occurred just a few weeks prior, a cow in early lactation may be a low producer. In this case, an excess of nutrients is more likely to increase the cow's fat reserves than her milk production.
- If the number of DIM is the only criterion, a high-producing cow moved from Group 1 to Group 2 at 151 DIM may

suddenly find herself short of nutrients. The change will undoubtedly affect production.

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How to calculate it

Valacta's Ration'L feeding software calculates a "milk grouping" for each individual cow. The milk grouping takes into account the milk production, components, growth requirements and body condition of each cow and ensures that all the cows in the herd are treated equitably. The cows are then assigned to different groups based on their milk grouping while respecting the number of cows that the producer wants to have in each group.

How many cows per group?

To some extent, the answer depends on the size of your herd, the capacity of your mixer, the layout of your barn, and a host of other factors. Nevertheless, there is one basic rule: aim for groups that have as close to an equal number of cows as possible. This simple concept will allow you to group together cows with similar requirements and answer their needs more specifically, as discussed above.

Good grouping improves your feeding margin. With appropriate grouping, your cows will benefit from well-balanced feeding consistent with their requirements. Hence you will be able to reduce your costs and losses and maximize your cows' production. In other words, good grouping will contribute toward increasing your feeding margin.

