

**Farm Name:** Ouellette Farms Limited

**Operators:** Roger, George, Richard Ouellette and Sons

**Farm Location:** Sarsfield, Ontario, Canada

**Herd Size:** 140 Holsteins

**Problem:** Fresh cow feed intake, milk fever and retained placentas

**Solution:** Animate<sup>®</sup> Anionic Mineral Supplement

The three-week window prior to freshening is one of the most critical periods in a cow's lactation. How she handles this transition will set the pace for her entire lactation. A successful transition helps yield a healthy, productive and profitable cow.

Ouellette Farms Limited in Sarsfield, Ontario, Canada, is family owned and operated by three brothers, Roger, George and Richard Ouellette, in addition to their sons, Hugo, Benoit and Martin, respectively. The Ouellettes farm 600 acres and milk 140 Holsteins three times a day. They know how important fresh cow productivity is to their profitability. In the past, too much time and money have been spent treating problematic fresh cows.



From left to right: George Ouellette, Richard Ouellette, Bruce Dewar (dairy specialist) and Roger Ouellette

Roger Ouellette handles all of the feeding and breeding decisions at Ouellette Farms. He has had trouble getting transition cows on feed and keeping them on, and he has dealt with too many retained placentas and milk fever cases. After several unsuccessful trials with other transition cow feed supplements, Animate Anionic Mineral Supplement proved to be the only supplement that helped increase appetite. Ouellettes' close-up ration, fed two weeks prior to calving, consists of first-crop hay (usually the driest and lowest potassium hay on the farm), corn silage, high moisture corn, haylage, a high calcium premix and a pelleted product containing Animate.

"Adding Animate to Ouellettes' close-up ration has not only helped cows clean after calving and prevent milk fever, it also has increased dry matter intake across the board," says Ouellettes' nutritionist, Jay Johnston of Richie Feed & Seed, Inc., Ottawa, Ontario.

Practically all cows encounter metabolic and digestive changes that can have a dramatic impact on their performance during the transition period and at calving. Fortunately, some cows make these

changes seamlessly while others develop serious physical impairments that have long-term effects on milk production. The Ouellettes know that a feed management program that maximizes dry matter intake while promoting ideal levels of calcium to prevent milk fever is the most economical way to minimize problems with transition cows.

Cows are hypocalcemic when their blood calcium levels are below 8 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl) and will usually go down with milk fever when their blood calcium reaches 5 mg/dl. According to Dr. Mike Hutjens, professor of animal science at the University of Illinois, anionic minerals cause the diet to be more acidic, increasing blood calcium levels by stimulating bone mobilization of calcium and calcium absorption from the small intestine. If a cow cannot absorb calcium efficiently from the digestive tract or mobilize it from her bones, she will become hypocalcemic or go down with milk fever. Cows with milk fever have a greater occurrence of other post-calving problems, such as higher blood cortisol levels that reduce immune response capability, a higher incidence of retained placentas, and more susceptibility to *Staph.*, *Strep.*, and coliform mastitis. They also are more likely to experience lower dry matter intake, suffer from ketosis and more frequent displaced abomasas—all of these yielding a higher culling rate.

**"Animate turned the trauma of the fresh cow transition into a window of opportunity," says Roger Ouellette.**

Recent research in feed and nutrition has focused on preventing milk fever, retained placentas, ketosis and other metabolic disorders that affect transition cows. Studies have shown that supplementing anionic minerals in close-up rations has reduced the occurrence of milk fever.

However, it is often difficult to apply typical anionic salts to dairy cow diets because of poor palatability and the potential for reduced dry matter intake, says Dr. Dirk Axe, director of technical services, marketing and product development at IMC Feed Ingredients. Using new patented technology, IMC formulated Animate, a uniform, granular anionic mineral supplement that is palatable when fed in a TMR or in top-dressed supplements.

"Since adding Animate, the Ouellettes' transition cow problems have almost vanished," says Bruce Dewar, dairy specialist for Richie Feed & Seed. "Dry matter intake, both pre- and post-fresh, has increased—and cows are healthier."

"Animate turned the trauma of the fresh cow transition into a window of opportunity," says Roger Ouellette. "It has taken the challenge out of dealing with fresh cows, put more milk in the tank sooner and promoted a healthier start to a rewarding lactation."