

It's not just what you feed, it's how you feed

FeedWatch Factsheet

There's a saying: "A cow will eat almost anything . . . as long as it is exactly what she was given the day before." If there are going to be two watchwords for feeding in the future, they are going to be "accuracy" and "consistency."

We are learning much more about the importance of providing the same feeds mixed in the same way and fed in the same way and at the same time every day (see page 202 in this issue). Provisions must be made to minimize sorting. The mix doled out in the last few feet of bunk must be the same as the first few feet. The nation's lowest-cost and most-effective managers have come to be obsessive about this.

In research done by Dave Mertens at the Dairy Forage Research Center, 44 Holsteins averaging 95 pounds of milk were fed a control ration or one with added water to mimic the impact of rain. The treatment dropped ration dry matter by 8 percent for three days. That change cut dry matter in-takes by 5.3 pounds, 2.6 pounds, and 1.8 pounds on Days 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Daily milk weights were off between 3 and 6 pounds per cow.

In our December 2010 issue, page 795, Bill Stone told of high-producing groups on two dairies, both of which were being fed 57 pounds of dry matter. The article explained how one dairy managed only 0.5 percent feed refusals, while the other was at 3 percent.



At 12 cents per pound of dry matter, that's a feed-cost difference of 20 cents per cow per day. That becomes more than \$60 per cow per year . . . \$6,000 in a 100-cow herd . . . \$60,000 in a 1,000-cow herd. We realize refusals often are refed, but there's a cost with doing that.

Mistakes such as overfilling mixer wagons and trucks, overmixing or undermixing, sloppy loading, having worn augers and blades, poorly added liquids, and faulty weights all prevent us from providing rations that are as consistent, accurate, and unsortable as they can be. And these kinds of errors keep our cows from staying on feed as well as they can, and they keep us from getting as much milk and components as we can at as low a cost as we can manage.

Talk to your feed rep, nutritionist, or other advisor about how you can fine-tune your feeding. More and more, it will be a matter of how we feed, not just what we feed.

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