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Feed Intakes & Production

(Edited from an article by Dr. Andrew L. Skidmore, DVM, PhD; Dairy Innovations, LLC)

Feed intake is a major factor that determines the productivity and efficiency of dairy cows. *Ad lib* access to feed has been a common practice and recommendation in feeding dairy cows for a long time. Starting prefresh or fresh cows on high energy diets, avoiding wide swings in daily intake, reducing subclinical and preventing clinical acidosis, and maintaining reasonable feed intake for the length of the lactation are all challenges in feeding lactating dairy cows. Alternative practices may encourage more uniform feed intake, decrease the incidence of digestive setbacks, and increase the margin of profit on dairy farms.

The severity of the problems mentioned above is often dependent on the person "reading the bunk" and how that person adjusts the feed cows receive on any given day. The 'reader' usually follows some protocol or intuition. This is art ~ not science. Some 'readers' are very good while others seem to be a little behind or ahead of the cows.

After a period of consuming high energy diets, feed intake will often decrease and the cows seem to "stall out", milking poorly or with poor feed efficiency. The result is mediocre performance and high feed cost. When this happens the cows appear to be healthy and in good condition. "Restarting" the rumen on these cows by increasing effective forage in the diet for a period of time will sometimes reestablish a higher intake.

The goal of any alternative intake strategy is efficient milk production and profitability, not maximum intake. In other words the ultimate goal is to give cows all the fresh feed they will eat but not a bite more. Maximizing profitable feed intake is all about precision bunk management.

When *ad lib* intake is not practiced, rate of passage, site of digestion and extent of digestion will change. This changes the whole dynamic of balancing rations and feeding cows. A less than *ad lib* intake system may not work on all cows or in all situations. It requires more management ability and attention to detail. But the potential returns are much higher. More research needs to be done with these strategies in relation to lactating cows.

Program feeding or limited maximum intake are similar systems of controlling intake. By definition, program feeding or limited maximum intake is using intake prediction equations to regulate consistent daily dry matter intakes. The objective is to maximize dry matter intake over an entire lactation. By contrast, *ad lib* bunk management maximizes feed intake on a daily basis without regard for the entire lactation period. With program feeding there is less daily overfeeding and feed efficiency is maximized because of consistent daily feed deliveries over the entire lactation. A large degree of bunk management is still needed when program feeding your cows.

By controlling upper intake levels, cows seldom exhibit the large downward spike of dry matter intake often observed with an *ad lib* intake feeding program.

On the other hand, feed bunk management and bunk space can be major obstacles to successful implementation of controlled intake feeding systems.

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Bunk management costs little more than a few minutes each day, but has a very significant impact on production costs. Diets almost always look right on paper and management is often "by the book" but some herds still experience low intakes, poor milk production and high feed costs. Fingers get pointed and the problem often goes unresolved.

Good bunk management is essential in efficient production of milk. It takes practice. Poor bunk management can lead to erratic intakes, feed wastage, digestive upsets and increased costs. The goal is precision bunk management, which can make a large difference in your profitability. It is a small investment with big ramifications. The key is to use records that are consistent, watch the cows, and feed the diet as it has been formulated.

PRESERVE FORAGES. GET RESULTS

⇨ KEMIN & BIOTAL ⇦

QUALITY… *with* RENAISSANCE!

Preparing for fall…

While the calendar says 'August', we all know that fall is right around the corner! Where does the summer go? This year has seen record growth for corn and alfalfa, small grains and grass in many areas. Hay has been cut and baled, and some forage has been put up as haylage. Soon corn will be chopped and stored for use this coming winter. Have you noticed your haylage or silage heating up? This process is detrimental to the quality and nutritional value of ensiled forages. Forages that heat also tend to reduce feed intake. This can also negatively impact your ration program, along with productivity and profitability. If you have not researched the benefits of using a quality, tested preservative or inoculant, get the facts today and see how this can become an investment in your entire management program. You'll appreciate the benefits this fall and winter. Choose the best… and you will appreciate results!

Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or want to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Call me! My goal is to help you. That's Renaissance's commitment to you!

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RENAISSANCE… *the TEAM for results*

A COMMITMENT TO LEARNING…

I have just attended our annual nutrition conference, where up-to-date information is presented. This is an ideal opportunity for me to continue providing you with cutting-edge information that focuses on dairy and livestock nutrition. The primary focus of this conference was dairy nutrition, cow comfort and management. Presentations on beef nutrition and programs were also given. The conference featured such notable speakers as Dr. Kohl (Virginia Tech), Dr. Collier (U of Arizona), Dr. Harrison (U of Washington); Dr. Grant (Miner Institute) and many others. This is part of my commitment to providing you with the very best service and information all year-round!

WHAT'S IT LIKE AROUND THE FARM?

Cow comfort is critical to their productivity. In addition to air, quality nutrition and water, there are four other cow requirements that contribute to productivity and profitability. These include the following: 1) Animals want to be clean. This includes a dry place to lie down, and confinement areas where they are not forced to stand in mud or manure; 2) They demonstrate a need for adequate space. Like us, cows need to have some "personal space." Overcrowding can cause problems; 3) Animals mark their territory. While applicable to a lesser extent with cows, they do like a place that is "familiar."; 4) Cows have a biological clock. They need time for eating and resting, and benefit from a routine. Consider what will make your cows more comfortable. Then watch them perform!

A POINT TO PONDER...

"Summer time and the livin' is easy," go the lyrics to a Gershwin song, and it seems as if it is moving faster with each passing day! Traditionally, summer is a time for picnics, barbeques, swimming and fun ~ and around the farm it means planting and harvest, dealing with heat stress, and the challenges of weather. Take time to enjoy the simple pleasures around you… things that bring refreshment and relieve stress in our day-to-day lives. Whether it is a few moments to take in a beautiful sunset, a deep breath of fresh country air, a picnic with the family or a neighborhood get-together, these things make a difference to you and those around you. Enjoy the summer… before it moves on to fall.

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Think harvest ~ think preserving!

Making a difference that counts.

CHECK IT OUT.