

Three Key Drivers of Feeding Success

By Felix Soriano

FeedWatch Factsheet

Working in Idaho recently, doing feeding audits and feeder schools, inspired me to write this. From my experience working with many dairy feeders, I believe there are three key drivers of success when it comes to feeding cows. I call them the PAC drivers of success:

- **Precision**
- **Attention to details**
- **Consistency**

If feeders can focus and excel in these areas, they will go a long way toward a successful feeding program.

Being precise especially is important due to high feed costs which make it important to feed the right amount of each ingredient every time. Like I always tell feeders during the training schools, "precision while feeding is crucial to the profitability of the dairy and to herd health."

It is very important for feeders to be very precise when loading ingredients in the mixer, mixing the feed the right amount of time, and dropping the right amount of feed in each pen.

What should you look for when evaluating feeding software reports?

1. Check loading error by feeder by ingredient. Shoot for less than 1 percent error.
2. The feeder work cost error report will show whether the feeder's precision loading and handling ingredients is costing the dairy or if it's right on target.
3. Review mix time by date and batch of feed prepared. While preparing a batch, the feeder must be focused on loading and mixing exclusively and should not be distracted by getting more hay, cleaning feed bunks, and so forth.
4. Look at feeder drop error. The target should be less than 0.5 percent error per pen. If one pen consistently gets underfed by 3 percent, for example, because that feeder tends to drop more feed in the first pen, then this can affect milk production by about 3 pounds per cow a day in that pen.

(For more information on evaluating feeders' performance, go to my website at www.apndairy.com.)

Feeders by trait need to be detail oriented and should focus on keeping clean and organized feed, commodity, and forage storage areas.

Great, detail-oriented feeders always identify TMR variations between days or within pens before herd health and milk production is affected. They always are alert to any change in cow feeding behavior or manure consistency and always maintain tractors, mixers, and other equipment in excellent condition.

Some feeders are better than others when it comes to attention to details, but everyone can be coached and trained to improve.

BE CONSISTENT

This is the absolute key driver of success and profitability. This relates to every task and process within the feeding program:

1. Always start feeding at the same time. Keep pen feeding order the same so each pen always is fed at the same time. Target a variation of no more than plus or minus 5 minutes.
2. Mixing times always should be the same. Check mixing time per load on the reports, and ensure that they always are almost the same between loads and between days.
3. Feed delivered at the bunk should be the same as what's on the nutritionist's feeding program. Like I tell feeders, the feed delivered on Monday must look the same as the one delivered on Sunday or Tuesday.
4. Always push up feed at the same time and the same number of times every day.

It is very important to create awareness among feeders of the importance of their role at the dairy. Sharing feeding costs and herd health information with them can be great motivators.

Developing reward programs focusing on precision, accuracy, and consistency can be beneficial.

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