

# Texas Dairy Matters

*Higher Education Supporting the Industry*

---

## MANAGING FEED VARIATION ON THE FARM

Ellen R. Jordan, Ph.D.  
Extension Dairy Specialist  
Department of Animal Science  
Texas AgriLife Extension Service  
The Texas A&M University System

Everyone knows that the nutrient composition of feeds change, but what can be done to minimize the impact on productivity.

Rations can be formulated to compensate for some feed variability, but this costs producers in increased ingredient expenses. Producers must take an active role in reducing variability as well.

Reduce ration variability by being selective about where ingredients are purchased. Commodities such as brewers grains or distillers grains purchased from a supplier with strict quality control standards have less variability than what is usually found in purchases on the spot market. Although the initial cost may be slightly higher, savings can result from not having to over formulate the rest of the ration to compensate for changes in nutrients.

Store high priced items in free flowing bins equipped with motor driven augers. When the specified amount of a feed is added to the mixer wagon, augers can be stopped quickly to prevent feeding more than needed. Feed bins also can reduce shrink losses caused by high winds.

Create a premix of items used in small quantities. Mix protein sources, bypass fat, mineral packages, vitamin premixes and other additives together so that a larger quantity can be added to the mixer



wagon. Include any item which is being fed at less than two pounds per cow per day. This will create a more uniform feed, while minimizing over additions. Time also can be saved.

Routinely check dry matter composition. Although most nutrients need to be analyzed at a commercial laboratory, determine dry matter content on the farm as well. Dry matter changes as a result of different harvesting dates or conditions, fermentation losses, seepage or from recent rainfall events. Use a food dehydrator, Koster tester, microwave oven or electronic moisture meter to supplement results from commercial laboratories.

Cows like consistency. Reducing variability through purchase management, ingredient handling, and dry matter monitoring can improve productivity and increase profitability.