

# Texas Dairy Matters

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## GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR FEED

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Feed costs are the greatest expense on a dairy. When feed prices move higher, margins become even tighter, making it difficult to build equity. A choice looms: cut back or remove feed ingredients from the ration, or forge ahead and maintain current ingredient levels. Either way, revisiting feed management pays off. If feed has been forward contracted for a lesser price, or is already stored in the bunker, it still must be closely managed.

With either option, where do you start when it comes to getting the most out of your feed? Walk out to the commodity barn on a windy day. Watch what is happening. How much feed is blowing away as the feeder is loading feed into the mixer? Or as the wind swirls through the bays, which bays lose feed? Small particles are very easily moved even with minor wind gusts, causing feed loss or “shrink.” Pelletizing; making a premix with dry, small particle feeds; and adding moisture may combat losses to wind.



Next, how do you monitor feed inventory? Adopt available software programs that track the amount of feed used in making the total mixed ration. In addition to monitoring “shrink,” some programs even calculate the accuracy with which each ingredient is added to every load. In some

cases, the savings in reduced feed waste pays for the software in a few years. Consider giving incentives to employees with the greatest accuracy in mixing feed.

Now take a look at silage piles. View the silage face and surrounding areas. Take note of face spoilage, whether fluid (leachate) exits the pile, and damage to the silage covering. Correcting spoilage and leachate issues require changes on the front end of storage. Both may be examples of poor packing or sizing the pile too large for the daily feedout rate. Nutrient leaching results from chopping the forage at a low dry matter. Repair damage to the silage covering immediately to prevent extended silage exposure to oxygen, which restarts fermentation and increases dry matter losses. Recheck silage chop length and the extent of kernel processing when viewing the silage. Should either differ from expectation, take note. Although it's too late for the current crop, plan corrective actions for the next silage harvested.

Reducing shrink through improved feed management also helps maintain feed quality. Increased vigilance pays off in recognizing losses that may be occurring through spoilage, allowing for action to be taken to remedy the situation. As quality goes up, the benefits to the animals consuming the feed increase since nutrient availability improves.



Involve multiple individuals to get the most out of your feed by decreasing shrink and maintaining quality. Instruct feeders to conduct daily inspections of feed to monitor quality and report issues. Ask your nutritionist to include a walkthrough of the commodity areas to provide additional scrutiny during their regular visit. Continued attention to feed management detail provides benefits in the long-term by reducing feed costs and maintaining feed quality.

Following the procedures outlined previously can help you get the most out of your feed. In the long run it will help your bottom line either by reducing feed losses or improving productivity.

<http://texasdairymatters.org>

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