

Reducing Feed Waste Can Return Big \$



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Farmers are always looking for ways to improve their bottom line. One aspect that can easily be overlooked is feed loss due to issues in fermentation, storage, feedout or bunk management. This article

provides ideas to help reduce feed waste that can improve a farm's profitability.

1. Efficient Fermentation of Feedstuffs

Typically, forages and high moisture grains left to uncontrolled/wild fermentation could experience a dry matter loss ranging from 12 to 30%. Use of an effective inoculant, such as Crystal Creek's Inoc-U-Lock™, on forages and high moisture grains has been proven to reduce dry matter loss, reduce nutrient loss, improve aerobic stability for less mold and yeast growth and reduce heating in the bunk after feedout. See Dan Leiterman's article from August 2015 that calculates the potential return on investment (ROI) when using a high quality inoculant like Inoc-U-Lock™. The use of the Inoc-U-Lock™ product can save conventional producers money with a ROI of approximately 3:1 while organic producers can have a ROI of over 9:1 simply based on a conservative reduction in dry matter loss and protein degradation (this does not include economics on animal performance). Visit www.crystalcreeknatural.com for more information regarding the economics of using Inoc-U-Lock™.

2. Proper Storage

It is never too late to evaluate potential feed losses due to storage issues. For example, if round bales are left out in the weather, the bales can have waste anywhere from 2-8" or more on the outer layer. If we assume there is a 4" weathered layer all around the bale, that represents 21% waste on a 6' round bale. If you have 100 tons of round bales for the year and we estimate a cost of approximately \$60/ton, your loss is 21 tons of hay due to weather, which equals \$1,260. Protecting the bales from weather by storing them in a shed, wrapping them with plastic or putting a tarp over them could help save

your operation a large amount of money. Ideally, the bales should be kept up off the ground to help prevent feed loss due to ground moisture.

Significant losses can occur to feedstuffs not properly stored. It is very important to harvest and store feed at the proper moisture. After harvest, while in storage, wildlife, birds and pets around the farm can poke tiny holes in the plastic allowing air into the storage structure. This can create small pockets of air that will cause feed to spoil. It is a good idea to have tape handy to patch up any holes found while feeding. Train the dogs, cats and children not to run or play on the feed piles to prevent creating any holes. Rats and mice are known for burrowing holes into bags and piles. Consider using bait to prevent them from eating into your feed. Silos do not typically have damage to feed due to animals but spoilage does occur in silos due to improper maintenance. Have an expert evaluate your silo to make sure it is properly sealed.

3. Feedout

Proper face management of forage bags, piles or bunkers will help eliminate spoiled feed during feedout. Removing spoilage is the first step to providing a quality feed to the herd. Spoiled feed can wreak havoc in the animals. It is better to spread spoiled forage in the field than to feed it to an animal. The amount of spoiled silage can be reduced by using a facer and taking off enough silage each day to stay ahead of heating. Ideally, a flat, smooth silage face should be left at the end of each day. Each storage structure has a different face size so it is good to evaluate how much feed removal is optimum for the face. The time of year can also play into how much feed has to come off the face.

Managing the feed at feedout is important as well. Variation in feedstuffs can lead to improperly balanced rations which can lead to decreased milk production and/or decreased average daily gain. Evaluate the feed regularly by testing the forage for quality and moisture content. The use of a Koster tester on the farm can help evaluate the moisture content of the feed on a more regular basis rather

than sending a sample off to the laboratory. If you have questions on where to buy, or how to use, a Koster tester please call one of the nutritionists at Crystal Creek®. If you observe any differences in feed quality, moisture, excessive heating, mold or strong odors, the Crystal Creek® staff can help create a customized strategy to help deal with these issues.

4. Bunk Management

Once feed is mixed properly, delivery of that feed at the right time and management of the feed at the bunk is essential to maintaining good herd performance and improving feed efficiency. Prior to feeding fresh feed each day, the bunks should be cleaned out to remove old forage that may have started to heat or mold. This is especially necessary during warm weather. Observe the bunks for weighback. Are the bunks empty? Is the weighback evenly distributed between the pens? Are weighbacks hot or smelly? Does the weighback look like the original TMR mix? Aim to have around 3% weighback and *never* feed to an empty bunk.

Once you have observed the weighbacks for each group, you can then make sure the right amount of fresh feed is available for the cows after milking. Push feed up often so cows do not have to stretch to reach the feed. Evaluate your bunk space so each animal has adequate space to eat. Milking cows require a minimum of 24" of bunk space. Headlocks are useful and help to reduce competition at the bunk compared to post and rail setups.

5. Inventory Management

Fall is a great time to evaluate feed inventory. Work with your nutritionist to calculate your inventory for the year to see if you have enough good quality forage to last until next year's harvest. If you are going to run short on hay, silage or corn, you can start planning with your nutritionist to create a strategy to help stretch out your current supply.

Feed waste can significantly reduce a farm's profitability. The friendly and professional staff at Crystal Creek® are a tremendous resource for dairy operations wanting a stronger bottom line.

