Dairy Technical Bulletin

World Class Feeders Start With Basics

Paul Dyk-QLF Dairy Technical Services Manager

Players in the World Cup are amazing! Great players can kick a ball above their head, spin a ball so that it slides around the keeper and make a ball look like it is attached to their shoe string.

We know that these players did not wake up one morning with these skills. They started with the basics. They needed to learn the simple skills like dribbling and passing well to make them great.

A feeder on a dairy farm must start the same way. The simple skills of feeding must be understood and mastered. Computers are wonderful tools and many mixers have digital scales to help the feeder. But they are only one part of the system. A feeder needs to keep his eye on the ball, which is consistency. Cows thrive on feed that is consistent, accurate and delivered on time.

So let's think of the basics we need to do right:

1. **Safety**

   You might think safety is not a skill, but being safe is the most important thing you can do. People have been killed by facers, mixers and tractors. Across the U.S., there have been deaths from collapsing feed in bunkers. You are more important than your job. Know when to say no. Climbing up a 20-foot bunker with a fork and getting five feet from the edge is not smart. Be very careful removing tires and plastic. When you sample feed, never approach the face of a bunker on foot.

2. **Determine the dry matter of feeds**

   The most important factor for a consistent feed from one day to the next is determining the dry matter of wet feeds. In a simple way, feed has two components: water and dry matter (everything else). When mixing feed you want to make sure the amount of dry matter going into the mixer matches the amount calculated on the computer. Haylage, corn silage, high-moisture corn and even wet distillers may have a different percentage of moisture every day. In a bunker with haylage, you will often see layers. One layer might be haylage harvested in the morning and one layer might be haylage harvested in the afternoon.

   Feed stored in bags is loaded in vertical layers at harvest time and the dry matter percent may change every few feet. Work with a nutritionist to develop a system and schedule to determine these dry matters. Ask the nutritionist for the best way to determine dry matters. A Koster tester, a microwave, a food dehydrator? Pick one that will yield accurate results every time. Of course once you have determined a dry matter, make sure you know how to adjust the ration for changes.

3. **Sample feeds correctly**

   For dry matter and lab analysis (to determine protein, energy, minerals etc.), it is critical to sample feeds correctly. For most bunkers, use a facer and shave off one day of feed. Put this in a mixer for a couple minutes, dump (not next to the bunker face) and sample. You should never "grab" sample feed from a face. This is dangerous and inaccurate. Sampling feed correctly the first time, will result in a more consistent TMR over time. If you spend

a few extra minutes getting an accurate sample, you may be able to sample less often. Bags can be very difficult to sample accurately. Samples taken at harvest for lab purposes may be more useful for many farms. Determining dry matter just before feeding may be helpful with bags.

4. Face and maintain bunkers and bags

Forage will degrade in quality when it is exposed to air (oxygen). For the last decade, facers have helped minimize the amount of forage exposed to air in a day. It is critical to remove enough forage every day to prevent the forage from heating. In addition, at the end of the day, we don't want a pile of feed at the base of the bunker. Keep bags neat and clean; we don't want plastic and dirt in the TMR.

5. Mix correctly

Every model of mixer is slightly different. Work with your nutritionist to develop a standard operating procedure for mixing. Over- or undermixing will lead to problems in TMR consistency and quality. Load ingredients in the same order every day. Mixing times are critical. Do you run the mixer while filling? How long do you mix after the last ingredient?

6. Communication

Many farms have a main feeder, but the weekend feeder is important also. Even if the main feeder has the mixing protocols memorized, written instructions are critical for the weekend feeder. All feeders should follow the same protocols. Mixing order, mixing time and time of delivery need to be consistent across feeders.

Quality Liquid Feeds
3586 Hwy 23 North
Dodgeville, WI 53533
1-800-236-2345
www.qlf.com

#TB-4332