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New Tool Simplifies Dairy Feed Rations

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Getting shouldered out at the community feeding trough has got to be one of the more unpleasant aspects of a milk cow's life.

But bossy's lot could become a little easier, thanks to an electronic feed-dispensing system designed and developed by ARS researchers in Illinois. The system lets each cow get her full share - when she wants it - from a stall in a loose-housing area where the dairy herd is free to roam.

Cows aren't the only ones who stand to benefit. The system would save labor, as well as valuable feed resources, by making feeding more efficient. Researchers emphasize that when cattle feed at a com-

mon trough outside the milking parlor, it's hard to maintain grain consumption levels that are tailored to each cow's output.

Group feeding outside the milking parlor also involves shifting cows from one group to another to regulate their feeding levels. Besides taking time, transferring the animals affects the social order of the new group and ultimately lowers milk production.

On the other hand, cattle that are group-fed in milking parlors may not have time to eat all their production-gauged rations while being milked. Parlor feeding can also lead to sanitation and fly problems.

How does the new system work? Each cow wears a neck collar fitted with a transponder - an electronically coded device that identifies the cow according to her milk production. When the cow moves her head into the feed trough, a coded device within the transponder starts to charge electronically, triggering a feed dispenser that slowly releases the cow's rations. When the device is fully charged, the dispenser stops and the cow gets no more

feed. But as the charge wears off, the cow may eat again. Rations are computed on a 12-hour basis, and may be eaten in as many - or as few - installments as the cow wants.

Engineers found that by calibrating the transponder and feed dispenser fairly accurately, errors in feeding rates can be held to within 10 percent of prescribed rations - a lot more control than dairymen can expect with conventional feeding practices.

Grass Clippings Being Used As Poultry Feed

Turf farm grass clippings, normally discarded as waste, may be a source for valuable poultry feed if dehydrated.

grass-based feed to his poultry, and he feeds the nutrient-rich poultry manure to his turf.

USDA's Agricultural Research Service has conducted tests with favorable results. Tests were conclusive enough to spur turf companies into operating grass dehydrators in California.

And a large farmer near Denver, Colo., is planning to integrate his turf operation with a new 200,000-bird poultry operation.

Researchers found that the grass was high in xanthophyll when fresh and retained most of it when dehydrated. It is high in protein (25 per cent) and low in fiber (20 per cent).

Additives helped to achieve retention of 85 per cent of the carotene and 75 per cent of the xanthophyll over 12 weeks.

The turf farmer who is incorporating a poultry operation is devising an efficient system: he feeds

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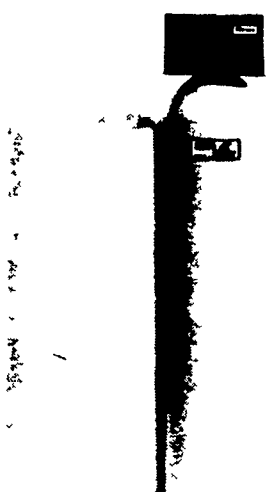


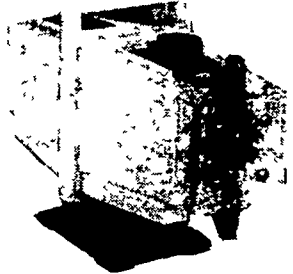
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