

Dairymen Learn About Ra

INTERCOURSE — Dairymen hold the responsibility for the quality of the rations fed to their herds by adhering to all aspects of a good testing program, according to a Penn State dairy specialist.

"Quality control of a ration is your responsibility, not the federal government's, university's or feed company's," Richard Adams told the group last week attending day three of the Lancaster County extension nutrition schools, held at the Harvest Drive Restaurant. Similar programs were also held in Berks and York Counties last week to conclude the three week school.

Farmers need to test rations at least quarterly, regardless of the ration's quality, Adams admonished. He advises quarterly testing on forages, grain and finished feeds or concentrate mixtures.

Some forages are consistent throughout the silo and some changes occur weekly, he added. With constant testing large gaps in nutrient levels can be avoided.

For forages he suggested heat-damage tests for protein on haylages and large-package hays and a full mineral analysis including trace mineral testing. When obvious changes occur for grains or forages in type, appearance or odor, testing is needed.

When high moisture ingredients are used in TMRs Adams recommends weekly testing.

"It is important that you get a representative sample of the feed," the dairy specialist said. The test sample needs to be a representative of what the cow is eating. Otherwise the ration will be determined with unrealistic values and not meet the animal's needs.

Representative samples include: for hay, cores from 12 to 18 bales; TMRs and ensiled items, composite of six feedings; mixed feeds or ingredients, composite of seven samples per shipment or seven feedings.

He advised monitoring and testing the quality of the water animals are drinking yearly or bi-yearly, dependent upon problems or a decline in the cows' water consumption.

Adams told the group to smell at look at their feed as tests of quality. "You got to look hard and smell hard." Foul smelling feed could be the result of abnormal fermentation. By locating the trouble early through the sniff test problems can be avoided, he said.

Look at the feed for mold, stones, trash and other foreign debris. These items add trouble and no nutrients to a ration, he explained. Through daily observation, farmers will be able to check for feed refusals by the herd or individual animals or distinct changes in appearance.

The dairy specialist listed the points to consider when developing a ration testing program:

- Use the services of a reputable and qualified nutritionist.
- Secure third party evaluation when hesitation or difficulties arise.
- Rations should be evaluated quarterly or when ingredients change.
- Separate rations should be used for dry cows, growing heifers and milking animals.
- Prior to making changes a nutritionist should be consulted.

Adams emphasized forage quality in a milking ration. Forages should contain a minimum of .591 Mcal of net energy per pounds of dry matter. Any amount under this level indicates an inferior product and will increase milk production costs.

In addition to quality control, a dairyman must make sure his animals are receiving enough of the right stuff. Feed scoops and other equipment used to feed by volume need monthly calibration.

Re-calibrate the measuring equipment when changes occur in moisture content, type of feed, particle size or formula, he said.

Problems with the ration can be observed through animal health, water intake and production information. "Use those items. They tell if there is a problem, or if something is costing you money. They're an indication something is abnormal," Adams said.

Health problems related to nutrition include displace abomasums, retained placentas, milk fever, off-feed, ketosis or mastitis.

If an animal is drinking large amounts of water it could indicate an over consumption of minerals or a mineral imbalance, the dairy specialist pointed out.

He urged the group to check their cows to see if the cows were chewing cud seven to eight hours a day. Rumen fill can be observed by looking at the triangle directly behind the shoulders.

The color, consistency and size of feed particles in the manure can also indicate the appropriateness of a ration, he noted.

Panel Discussion

At Wednesday's session, four



A panel of feed company nutritionists discussed on farm feeding challenges at the Lancaster Nutrition School. Included in the discussion were, Nevin Gish (left), McCracken Feed Mills; Tim Snyder, Pennfield Feeds; moderator Glenn Shirk, extension agent; Jeff Zechman, White Oak Mills; and Ronald Moore, Youngs Minerals.

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