dhia

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# Dairyman to Dairyman

**Question: What does it mean when we see an up and down trend in our MUN test from one month to the next?**

During the past few months, I attended more than two-dozen meetings where this same question was asked. I am certain that sometimes a change in the MUN levels of the herd is due to dietary differences that occur as we move downward in our silos. This year a number of dairies are also seeing this effect due to shortages of feeds like high moisture corn. Changing to dry corn can impact MUN quite suddenly. Most dairymen recognize changes during a feeding period and can usually adjust for these by matching them up with the MUN story that the cows tell. What goes on when we are sure that no feed changes have taken place and yet we see significant movement in MUN?

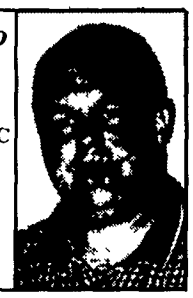
Often we need to look beyond what we do to "how" we do it. When this question is asked, we need to talk about how we do things in our feed management. The huge swing to AM-PM testing programs in past years, due to economic concerns, has sent us a message about how we feed our cows. In 1995, MUN testing was started in PA DHIA and another message was sent. If we choose to listen to our cows we can come to some eye-opening conclusions.

Now it is my turn to ask the questions. Do we feed a TMR? Is anything fed outside of the TMR? What is the moisture of the TMR? When feeding components, what is the sequence? Are the cows fed the same during the night as in the day? What is the refusal rate of feeding? If you have not noticed, all these questions address the "how" that goes into our feeding programs. Most of the time, when MUN is higher one month and lower the next in a continuing pattern, we are witnessing our cows' evaluation of how we feed them. In this particular herd the feed program went like this:

- PMR (partially mixed ration) fed during the day
- Top dress grain used on high producers
- Hay fed during the night

When we look at the diet as a whole, we see a well-planned and balanced diet. When we look at the different diets fed during the day and then those fed at night we see that they are very different. From the MUN numbers, we see that every other month the cows are below the 10 to 14 range that we would like to see. The next month they are right in the middle of that range. Our cows are telling us that half the day they simply run out of gas. If we use MUN values to guide us, then we may want to change "how" to include a plan that delivers a more equal flow of nutrients both day and night. We can do this in ways that do not increase labor costs. Certainly feeding closer to a true TMR would be desirable, but not always practical. What if we fed part of the hay during the day and supplied our cows with some of the PMR just before we leave the barn for the night? I think we should consider this.

*Dairyman To Dairyman*



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Covering every scenario would be time consuming and would not serve any purpose. Each time I am asked to address this problem of up and down MUN values each month, the same answer surfaces. The cows are telling us that the "how" part of our feeding program needs to be changed until MUN becomes more consistent. For those dairymen that test 2x, you will not have the advantage of your cows telling you as directly that feed nutrients do not flow evenly during the day. We may learn from others if it is likely. At PA DHIA we are committed to using records to help you manage your herd. If MUN is confusing, or you want a second opinion, call me to set up an appointment for your free MUN consult.

## Average Farm Feed Costs for Handy Reference

**To help farmers across the state to have handy reference of commodity input costs in their feeding operations for DHIA record sheets or to develop livestock feed cost data, here's last week's average costs of various ingredients as compiled from regional reports across the state of Pennsylvania.**

**Remember, these are averages, so you will need to adjust your figures up or down according to your location and the quality of your crop.**

**Corn, No.2y — 2.46 bu., 4.40 cwt.**
**Wheat, No.2 — 2.39 bu., 3.99 cwt.**
**Barley, No.3 — 1.76 bu., 3.77 cwt.**
**Oats, No.2 — 1.53 bu., 4.77 cwt.**
**Soybeans, No.1 — 4.76 bu., 7.94 cwt.**
**Ear Corn — 76.75 ton, 3.84 cwt.**
**Alfalfa Hay — 132.50 ton, 6.63 cwt.**
**Mixed Hay — 136.25 ton, 6.81 cwt.**
**Timothy Hay — 140.00 ton, 7.0 cwt.**