

Feed Management Software.....What We Have Learned – Part 2

THE CLEAN-UP DEBATE

by Keith Sather

Editor's note: Keith Sather is President of K.S. Dairy Consulting, Inc., and Feed Supervisor® Software in Dresser, Wis. He serves as a nutritionist for dairies in northwestern Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota. He developed Feed Supervisor® Software, which helps dairies around the country manage their feeding programs.

One of the biggest management questions since the implementation of Total Mixed Rations has been how much to over feed the cows. There are many theories being used, which range from feeding to an empty bunk to feeding very excessive levels of clean up. The terminology for left over feed has just as many variations including clean up, refusal, weigh back, orts. In Feed Supervisor® Software, we use the term “clean up”.

During the summer of 2001, I began monitoring the level of clean up from dairies across the country and found a range in lactating cow pens running from 0 to 14%. Clean up on these dairies was dealt with in a variety of ways including disposal, feeding to heifers and feeding back to lower producing lactating cows.

The biggest concern with weigh back is the economic impact that it has on the dairy. This brings up the questions of how much is enough to maximize milk production and what level is too much resulting in a financial loss. For many producers, the fact that clean up is being fed to heifers creates the feeling that they are not wasting the feed. I would challenge this idea because in my 18 years as a dairy nutritionist, I have never found the need to balance a heifer ration with expensive feed ingredients such as cottonseed. The concept of feeding clean up back to a milking pen can cause ration variation and may limit milk production especially during warm weather.

When it comes to efficiently managing clean up, a feed management system such as Feed Supervisor® becomes a valuable tool. Implementing Feed Supervisor® on the dairy provides the manager with a means of tracking clean up versus dry matter intakes and milk production. This information allows the dairy to find the level of clean up that will maximize milk production while limiting the amount of wasted feed. For one dairy this meant reducing clean up from 8% to 5% with no loss in milk production.

There is no magic number that fits all dairies when it comes to the most efficient level of clean up. A six-row barn presents different challenges than a four-row barn. The type of ration being fed and the level of management being applied to the feeding program all come into play. This takes us back to the value of a feed management system and the information that it can bring into this decision making process.

During the summer of 2002, we revisited the dairies included in the 2001 data to observe how the management of clean up had changed while using Feed Supervisor® Software. There was a definite shift in the level of clean up on these dairies with the range now running between 1.5 and 8.1%. This data was collected over a six-month period beginning in March and running through August.

The data in Table 1 demonstrates the potential economic impact that the level of clean up can have. Both of the dairies included in this comparison have 6 row barns and almost identical levels of dry matter intake and milk production. The striking difference between the two operations is the amount of feed being cleaned up. Farm A had an average clean up of 7.1% while farm B ran a clean up level of 2.9%. The table represents data collected over a six-month period on each dairy. The \$18,396.00 demonstrates the savings of Farm B over Farm A when the data is applied to 400 cows and spread over a full year.

The level of management must be intensified as you work to reduce the amount of clean up on your dairy. This means being proactive in how you feed cows rather than reactive. Instead of chasing your cows on a daily basis, watch for trends over two to three days. Most importantly don't forget the basics such as closely monitoring forage moisture. Tightening up on clean up from both a managerial and feeding standpoint will help reduce costs, again, as the research illustrates.

I want to emphasize that there is not a single clean up value that applies to all dairy farms. The type of barn, environment, ration and management level all must be considered. The data that we have analyzed demonstrates that it is possible to produce a high level of milk, with lower levels of clean up than has been traditionally accepted. The data also suggests that we can manage clean up within a tighter range than what is allowed on many dairies without empty bunks. The Clean Up Tracking Report within Feed Supervisor® offers you an excellent tool to determine the most efficient and cost effective level of clean up for your dairy.

<h2>Clean Up</h2>			
	Milk	DMI	% Clean Up
Farm A 6 Row Barn 300 Cows	81.5	55.1	7.1%
Farm B 6 Row Barn 450 Cows	82.9	55.5	2.9%

Difference in Clean Up 4.2%

Consider: 100# of feed fed per cow
 Feed cost = \$0.03/pound as fed
 400 Cows
 365 Days

Dropping clean up from 7.1% to 2.9% saves the dairy **\$18,396.00**