



*Department of Animal &
Food Sciences*

531 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19716-2150

Phone: 302-831-2522
FAX: 302-831-2822

Email: LKUNG@UDEL.EDU

Troubleshooting Nutrition Problems on the Farm

Limin Kung, Jr., Ph.D.
University of Delaware

Here are a few basic things to ask and look for when cows don't milk or eat like we think they should:

- 1) Were representative samples of current feeds recently analyzed and shipped correctly to a lab?
- 2) Has the ration been correctly formulated with analyzed nutrient analyses (not book values) for the target group of animals?
- 3) Are animals properly grouped by level of production? (too fat, too skinny, dry, etc.?)
- 4) Is the mixed and the fed ration the same as what was formulated? (Who is feeding?)
- 5) Are you weighing feeds in the correct proportions? (daily!)
- 6) Are you making accurate estimates of DM%? (especially fermented feeds, new silage, etc.)
- 7) Are you adhering to proper TMR mixing times? (over mixing causes reduction in particle size)
- 8) Is the forage/feeds consistent? (cows are like consist, high quality feed)
- 9) Ammonia smell in barn? (too high degradable protein?, rebalance nitrogen)
- 10) Gray, watery feces? (acidosis?)
- 11) Feces too dry? (check waterers)
- 12) Excess corn in feces (not always a good indicator, but may need to process corn)
- 13) Are forages being harvest at optimum maturity and chop length? (before 1/10 th bloom for alfalfa; 35% DM for corn silage)
- 14) Are silos being filled quickly to the right density (14 lb DM/cu/ft), and covered immediately?

- 15) Are you allowing silages to cure before feeding? (optimum at least 30-45 days)
- 16) Do you make gradual changes in any new feed? (best to take 10-14 days)
- 17) Are weigh cells working and calibrated? (calibrate at least 2-3 times a year)
- 18) Is the presentation of the feed OK (i.e. not rained, etc.)?
- 19) Are bunks and area around the bunks, clean and accessible? (not 3 feet of mud deep!)
- 20) Are cows sorting the TMR? (use a box, every 8-12 hr for several days; add molasses, check mixing time, check chop length)
- 21) Do cows have access to fresh water (check quality and refill rate, 1 per 20 cows, proximity to feed)?
- 22) Are cows still slug fed grain in the parlor (think about moving to a TMR)?
- 23) Check incidence of metabolic disorders. (Are they abnormal, lameness, etc.?)
- 24) Do cows have access to fresh feed right after milking? (keeps cows standing, teat closes)
- 25) Of cows lying down, are at least 60% chewing cud?
- 26) Are you body scoring? (cows drying off at 3.5, not loosing more than .5 units in early lactation)
- 27) Are cows using freestalls? (majority should to prevent mastitis, if not, ask why? too dark, no brisket board? bad dimensions?)
- 28) Is there adequate feedbunk space? (for at least 75% of cows at any one time)
- 29) Check feedbunk height. (not too high)
- 30) Are feed bunks full most of the day? (or at least pushed up regularly)
- 31) Are there management techniques for dealing with hot/humid weather? (mistors, fans, etc., watch out for excess humidity with misting)
- 32) What is the photoperiod like during the winter months? (16L-8D, 20 foot candles or 200 lux at cow eye level)