

# Manage the 3 F Components of Your Nutrition Program



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## Forage – harvest and store the highest quality forages nature allows

\* High-quality forages are more digestible and result in more energy available to support higher milk production. In addition, less grain needs to be fed to meet her energy needs. Remember that energy is the hardest nutrient to get into your cows. With feed costs increasing, harvesting and storing high quality forages will be extremely critical, as always, but especially this year with higher feed and fertilizer costs.

\* Application rates of fertilizer for crops should account for nutrients supplied by manure application to keep costs in line as much as possible.

\* Small grains should be harvested at the boot stage of maturity (before a seed head appears). If weather presents challenges, wheat harvested as silage can be delayed to the soft dough stage, but fiber contributed by the forage component will be higher. Rye and triticale should be harvested at the boot stage of maturity as quality decreases tremendously thereafter.



\* Silages should be ensiled at 30-38% dry matter (62-70% moisture) and inoculants may be beneficial depending on the crop. Small grain silages will be in the lower end of the range whereas corn silage will be between 35 to 38% dry matter. Grasses and alfalfa silages benefit the most from the use of inoculants.

\* Test forages for their nutrient values so the appropriate amount and composition of grain mix can be fed to not only the milking herd, but heifers and dry cows also.

## Feeds found in the ration

\* Forages are the most economical source of nutrients and the more home-grown forages included in diets, generally the more economical rations potentially can become.

\* Cows need nutrients, not ingredients. Remember that various feeds provide cows nutrients needed to support milk production, reproduction, growth of first calf heifers, and health. Thus, some cost savings may be available with alternative ingredients for those who did not book feed at an established grain cost this past year. The key is to find a combination that supports the health and greatest income over feed costs. Thus, performance and cost savings are important as a package, not separately.

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## Manage the 3 F Components of Your Nutrition Program

\* Nutritionists continue to learn more about what cows need at different stages of lactation. For example, we know that cows, and more correctly the rumen bacteria, need sugars and that not all protein, fats, and carbohydrates are created equal. An updated Dairy NRC, which outlines nutrient requirements, will be released late summer and will continue to shape on-farm feeding programs.

## Feedbunk Management –

\* This aspect of the feeding program can easily get overlooked, especially with spring field work taking a priority. However, this management aspect has a major impact on milk production, reproduction, and overall health of the cows in the milking herd.

\* The priority should always entail giving cows the opportunity to eat whenever they want, especially those fresh and early lactation cows. For every pound of TMR or combination of forage and grain equivalent to that found in a TMR that cows eat, generally enough energy is supplied to support a pound of milk (1 lb dry matter or 2 lbs of TMR as fed = 2 lbs of milk). Attention to all of the details can easily be overlooked and taken for granted.

\* Key areas often overlooked include: (1) Feed (not refusals) available at the morning feeding and feed amounts adjusted to account for changes in group sizes and intake of cows, (2) feed evenly distributed throughout the entire length of the feedbunk, (3) cows can easily reach feed (with automatic feed pushers—check that they working properly), (4) TMR mixers are mixing feed so that the feed is uniformly mixed and delivered throughout the feedbunk, (5) cows have fresh feed upon return from milking, and (6) the feedbunk is cleaned out daily—enough feed is fed so the bunk needs to be cleaned.