

Ways to Cut Feed Costs with Narrow Profit Margins

COOPERATIVE
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- **Use your feed dollars wisely:** Calculate your feed costs and income over feed cost – Realize that sometimes spending a little bit of money is necessary for more profit in the end. An example would be providing the proper amounts of mineral and vitamins to dairy heifers and dry cows. These nutrients are important for the health of these dairy animals especially after they calve. You may not see the financial reward for providing these nutrients now but if they calve with mastitis or other health issues, income will be reduced.
- **Re-evaluate rations being fed more often and be flexible for different approaches to feeding your dairy cows:** Feed a balanced ration that provides what your cows need. Cows need nutrients not ingredients in their diets. Other purchased feeds may be more economical and still provide the needed nutrients. With rapidly changing prices of ingredients, unless you have a set price for your grain mix, rebalancing rations more often may be necessary to best use your forages, labor, and feed purchasing dollars. Group feeding may or may not save money and needs to be evaluated for an individual's operation. Feed additives also need to be evaluated to see if they are appropriate and produce a financial return for your herd.
- **Do you need to feed Western Alfalfa Hay?** Not only has this hay become hard to find but the cost has increased tremendously over the last few years. In dairy cow diets, western alfalfa hay, with a relative feed value of 180, provides effective fiber or chew factor for the cow to maintain rumen health and butterfat in a package that also provides high quality nutrients such as energy, protein, minerals and vitamins. Other forages can take its place as long as they provide effective fiber in a package that is of high quality which does not limit total feed intake and digestibility within the cow's rumen.
- **Forages are the most economical feed for the dairy herd.** Harvest and feed the highest quality forages mother nature will allow you to harvest. This year, many dairy farmers were able to harvest high quality wheat or rye silage or baleage. This will go a long way in designing economical feeding programs to keep feed costs down and to get dairy cows to milk. Take advantage of these forages by testing them and using these results to balance rations. These forages can replace some of the high priced Western Alfalfa Hay.