

WORK WITH FEEDERS

TO REDUCE COSTS, IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

Communicating with your feeders is critical if you want to reduce costs and improve feed efficiency.

By Felix Soriano

How often do you monitor feeding accuracy of your feeders?



When was the last time you talked to them about their role in your dairy's profitability? Communication and feedback are key steps to reduce feed cost and improve feed efficiency.

FYI

■ Felix Soriano is a labor management and human resource consultant with APN Consulting LLC, War-
rington, Pa. Contact him via phone: 215-738-9130, e-mail: felix@apndairy.com or visit www.apndairy.com.

Here are six practices managers should consider to improve a feeder's performance and reduce feed cost:

1) Have a meeting with your feeders and talk to them about the importance of their role. Refresh protocols and explain the "whys" of each step of the loading, mixing and feeding process. Be specific about the economic impact their performance and accuracy have on feed cost and income

over feed cost. Take this opportunity to talk to them about the current dairy economic crisis and give an example of income over feed cost.

2) Define your key performance indicators (KPIs). You should be able to monitor KPIs daily, and these should be directly affected by the feeder's performance. Also, KPIs should have an impact on cow performance, feed cost and overall dairy profitability. Using a feed management software like Feed Watch or TMR Tracker will help

monitor feeder's performance more easily and accurately. Some examples of KPIs affecting a dairy's bottom line are:

- **loading accuracy** (individual ingredients and overall feed)
- **feeding accuracy** (variation between expected amount of feed per pen and actual amount fed)
- **mixing time** (can have an impact on herd health and performance)
- **shrink losses of key ingredients** (keeping good inventories is crucial).

3) Give good and periodic feedback. This is a great way to tell your feeders what you are looking for and, when done correctly, can be an excellent way to keep employees motivated. For example, post the KPI numbers daily in a place where feeders have daily access. Leave a note saying "great job" or "keep up the good work" when numbers are improving or are excellent. Before posting KPIs, and make sure everyone understands what they mean.

4) Recognize great performance and penalize poor performers. Develop a bonus program, rewarding excellent performance, but also penalizing poor performance. Feeders must know – in advance – the consequences for not performing according to expectations. A good example can be rewarding loading accuracy (feeders can make more money as loading errors are reduced). Rewards may vary depending on the type and cost of the ingredient.

5) Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs). This may seem time consuming, but it can bring a lot of benefits.

SOPs will help reduce errors and variations between feeders; improve feeder's confidence; and are useful when training new employees.

Have your key feeder help develop SOPs. This will give him a sense of ownership of the SOPs, and help the entire team buy into SOP implementation. Translate all protocols into Spanish if you have Spanish-speaking employees.

Reinforcing the importance of their role, constantly giving feedback, and rewarding excellent performance can go a long way with your employees – and reduce feed costs and improve income over feed costs.

6) Develop a training/orientation program for new feeders. This will reduce errors and feed costs, and improve the chances of success of your new feeder.

First, establish who the trainer will be and train that person as a trainer (train the trainer). If necessary, bring an outside specialist to help

develop this training/orientation program. Preferably, this consultant should speak the same language as your employees.

Important topics to consider for a training program are:

- dry matter calculations
- importance of loading accuracy
- the mixing process
- the feeding process
- feed bunk management
- mixer maintenance
- proper silo face bunk management
- feed inventory
- feed shrink

By taking these steps you will improve your feeder's desire to perform at their maximum level. Reinforcing the importance of their role, constantly giving feedback, and rewarding excellent performance can go a long way with your employees – and reduce feed costs and improve income over feed costs. □