

New Year's Resolutions – Dairy Style Laura Martin, M.Sc



Another year is coming to an end. Harvest is done, incentives are over and after the holidays there will hopefully be some time to catch a breath before the snow falls and adds more chores back to the list. This is a perfect time to make some New Year's Resolutions for the dairy farm. Just like personal resolutions, these can be areas that need improvement on the farm, or goals for better production/profits.

From crop selection to feeding management, it is a good time to sit down with the team and go over goals for the new year.

Choosing which seed to purchase for next year's crops is sometimes a guessing game. Go over historical crop data from the farm with a crop consultant, check out the almanac and discuss what might work best for the coming year. It's not just about how the crop looks in the field, or how much it yields (although those are both important), it's how well the animals perform when the crop is fed out. The cows won't appreciate having a high yielding, but poor quality corn silage. Most farms will be getting into 2015 corn silage, if they haven't already, and it is an excellent time to observe how well cows are doing on this year's variety. If production could be better, or even if it's just time to try something new, research different varieties and talk over any decisions with the team. Inside this Issue... *New Year's Resloutions - Dairy Style* By: Laura Martin, M. Sc, Nutritionist



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Picture 1: Feed waste in feed room



Picture 2: Feed waste in yard

Set a goal to reduce shrink loss next year. Shrink loss, on a dairy farm, is wasted feed that is purchased or harvested but doesn't get fed to the animals. Shrink losses can occur due to a number of reasons. For harvested feeds, there is loss in the fields as it is harvested, loss along the road as it blows out of the wagon, loss if it is blown into a silo, loss at feed out due to spoilage or spillage, and loss with refusals at the feed bunk. For corn silage this loss of feed can add up to over 20% and hay crop forage losses are even higher. Feeds that are bought in off farm also have shrink losses, whether from unloading from the truck, or unloading as it is fed out. When setting a goal to reduce shrink losses, it is important to know how much feed is currently being wasted. In order to calculate shrink losses, it is important to know how much the crop yielded in the field, or how much product was delivered to the farm, and how much of it actually got fed to the animals. Some of these values are hard to figure out at this point of the year but a walk around the farm can show guite obvious areas that need improvement (see Pictures 1 and 2). A lot of time and money is spent harvesting and purchasing feed for the animals and it is a shame to see so much of it wasted.

While touring the farm looking for ways to reduce shrink losses, pause at the forage bunks, or run the silo unloader and take a look at forage processing. Could it be better next harvest? The best way to check chop length of corn silage is to use a Penn State particle size separator. The recommendations for particle size for both processed and unprocessed corn silage are in Table 1. BMR corn silage should be chopped a little bit longer than conventional corn silage as the fibre is highly digestible. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin recommend a minimum chop length of 0.5 inches for BMR silage. If the corn silage is supposed to be processed, check how well it is processed by taking a 4-cup sample of silage and checking it for kernels. If there are more than 2 whole or half kernels in the sample, a better goal for processing next year's crop may need to be set. Grass or alfalfa haylage should be chopped at around 3/8 - 1/2 inch in length. If haylage is chopped too long, check the knives in your mower and either sharpen them or add more before next harvest.

Set a goal to increase dry matter intake in the milk cows for a more immediate change. December this year came with a 2% increase in quota and increasing intakes in cows can increase milk production. Pushing up feed at the bunk can increase feed intakes. Mixing a fresh TMR for the cows can also greatly increase intakes. Even if there isn't time to re-mix for the whole herd, concentrating on the high producing girls can have a big impact on milk production. It is not hard to keep track of intakes and see if the changes made have had an impact.

Not all resolutions need to have specific goals. A good resolution might be to make mixing the TMR more efficient so that time could be better spent elsewhere. Most nutrition companies send out mixing sheets for the TMR. Make sure that the mixing sheet is in the order that works best on the farm. Less time will be spent trying to find the right feed on the paper, or less time running around mixing in the order that is on the paper.

An important thing with setting goals is to make sure everyone involved with the farm knows the goals and was involved in the decision making process. Setting incentives or rewards for reaching the goals can help motivate the team. Take some time and have a group meeting and discuss areas that could be improved in the new year... and hopefully these resolutions last longer than most!

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	Particle Size (inch)	Un-Processed Silage % of sample	Processed Silage % of sample
Upper Sieve	> 0.75	3 to 8	15 to 20
Middle Sieve	0.31-0.75	45 to 65	45 to 65
Lower Pan	Less than 0.31	30 to 45	20 to 35

Table 1: Forage Particle Size Distribution Guidelines for Corn Silage*

* Using a Penn State Particle Size Separator

(from Hinen, 2006)



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