



DN NEWSLETTER

issue 52

In this issue of the DN Newsletter for Farmers, we look at getting the feeding right for our livestock which is key for performance. The rumen microbes want consistency and stability. Our management on farm will be the underlying factor to ensure this is achieved.

Method of Feeding

Method of feeding and the attention to detail within this will be the first area to consider. How are the stock fed? Is this the same every day? Is feed available to all animals easily and constantly?

If you have a mixer wagon and are feeding a total or partial mixed ration through it, then this consistency should be achievable. However, it will depend on the person filling the mixer wagon. It is the same person responsible for feeding every day? Are the people responsible for feeding trained to understand the importance of consistency and reliability for the cow?

Is the mixer wagon loaded in the best order?

For horizontal mixers the order recommended is:

1. Long Stem Hay/Straw
2. Grains/Dry premixes
3. Silage
4. Wet commodities
5. Liquids

Does the mixer wagon have weigh cells present to check accurate loading and is this followed carefully?

It is useful to make mixing more efficient by having feed sources accessible and prepared. Can hay or straw be pre-chopped to reduce mixing time? Could concentrate sources be pre-mixed so they can be added as one item rather than individual straights being added every time?

Is the silage clamp carefully maintained and a shear grab used to ensure the silage keeps well and therefore feeds well? Chop length throughout the mix should be consistent to reduce sorting once the mix is fed out. Ideally all effective fibre sources will be approximately 19mm length. If the mix is dry due to high dry matter forages, then adding water helps intakes and reduces sorting by the cows.

When feeding out it is important to maximise feed space for the cows so ensure the feed is distributed the full length of the trough or feed passage. Make sure that any residual feed is cleaned away before fresh feed is fed out. Push the feed up regularly to allow maximum access by the cows.

Check water troughs are clean and adequately supplied. Check there is enough access to water troughs for the number of cows in the group. Always have at least 2 water troughs per pen. Target 9cm per cow access.



The target is to maximise dry matter intake to optimise rumen health and performance. Taking time over how we feed is as important as what we feed.

Mixer Wagon Analysis

1. Look inside empty mixer

- Check for feed left inside after last feeding
- Count knives and look at condition
- Observe kicker plate and notice any excessive wear
- Check placement of baffles

2. Look inside mixer when mixing

- Safely climb on platform and observe when one-third full, half full, and full
- Look for mixing action above auger, at tub divider and around discharge door
- Notice location of any dead feed areas

3. Watch mixer during unloading

- Do a ride along or use a Go-Pro camera to assess the feed inside the mixer to observe if unloading evenly. Even with a front discharge door, the feed level in each tub should be close to equal.

4. Monitor loading technique

- Highly recommended to keep the mixer turning while loading the ration.
- When loading ingredients with small inclusion rates or a small load, it's best to load down the side wall of the wagon instead of dumping the ingredient directly over the augers. The wagon will never get full enough to work feed over the entire auger.
- Use spreader bar for loading liquid ingredients.
- Allow at least 3-5 minutes of mixing time after the last ingredient.
- Load ingredients on a level surface.



5. Unloading

- Correctly distribute feed along bunk. Close enough to avoid cows reaching.
- Use correct tractor RPM, speed, and door opening to provide even flow of feed and level feed out.

6. Servicing equipment

- All mixer wagons work as intended when they are new. The internal components will wear out and require periodic servicing or replacement. Bottom line: after 6 months, don't expect the wagon to perform like the day it arrived to the dairy.

