

Feeding cattle indoors is a fine art and it is often discussed that there 3 possible diets a cow might be eating:

- The diet on paper- this is the diet formulated by the farmer or nutritionist which should contain the optimal ingredients for the cow/ system.
- The diet mixed- this is the diet mixed by whoever is doing the feeding; hopefully it resembles that on the ration sheet!
- The diet fed/ accessible to the cow- this is what we will focus on in this month's newsletter. However well put together a diet is, there are various factors which can affect a cow's dry matter intake.

Often, problems with poor feed intake are as simple as looking at the feed face.

Three of the most common issues found when feeding cows are:

- Insufficient feed space
- Rough surfaces for feeding
- Fresh food being placed onto of stale/ rotten food

The easiest way to assess suitability of a feed face is to watch cattle feeding.

Are smaller animals being pushed out of the way or hanging back rather than coming up to eat? The best time to assess this is straight after milking, or when fresh food has been placed out as this is when there demand on space.

Check the animals' necks for signs of rub marks/ sores which may indicate the neck rail is too low, or animals are reaching forward to feed, perhaps because the feed isn't being pushed up often enough.



NEWSLETTER - Sept 2021

Feeding Cattle

Space for feeding

The amount of feedspace recommended per adult animal is 70cm, with transition/ fresh cows ideally having 90cm per animal. This should be enough to allow all animals to access feed at any one time, meaning less dominant cows do not get bullied away and then miss out on feed time.

Feeding surface

Cows do not like eating off rough surfaces- there are two reasons for this:

- Discomfort of the tongue and mouth
- Rotten food sitting in cracks and gaps providing an unpleasant smell



Silage is acidic and so will erode concrete relatively rapidly. As a rough guide, run your knuckles over the feed surface; if it hurts your knuckles it will also be discouraging cows from feeding.

Acid resistant tiles or fibreglass can be placed at the feed face to provide a smooth surface or alternatively rubber paints, or resins, can be used.

The trough/ floor surface should be 10-15cm higher than the surface on which the cows are standing to relieve pressure on the feet/ neck. Rubber matting along the standing side of the feed face can also help reduce stress on the feet and encourage standing to feed.

As a side, the neck rail should be placed 20-30cm in front of the brisket board/ trough side and should be 120-150cm high for adult cattle. The neck should not be touching the rail when the cow is eating. Trough sides and brisket boards should be 50cm high, any higher can put pressure on the bottom side of the neck.







Cleaning up

Contrary to what you might think, cows are actually fussy eaters. Any leftover stale/ smelly food underneath the fresh food provided will put cows off eating and reduce intakes.

In addition, food which has been sitting rotting for days or even weeks, not only loses nutritional value, it also allows a build up of toxins which can be detrimental to cow health.

Ideally, we should be feeding for about 5-10% leftover, which should then be removed before fresh feed is provided. If removed daily, this leftover feed can be fed to youngstock or beef animals.

If the building is passageways rather than troughs, feed should be pushed up AT LEAST 2-3 times per day to ensure maximal intakes and reduce wastage.

A note on water

Lactating cows require 60– 100l of water per day so, as well as considering access to food, water access is also very important. A cow can drink 14l/minute and so adequate flow and space are essential.

10cm per cow trough space should be allowed, and a flow rate of 10l/minute into troughs to ensure rapid filling.



If cows are fed in the parlour, a trough should be made available just outside the parlour, and the same for any area when the cows might be locked in for any period of time (eg before AI).

As with their food, cows are fussy when it comes to what water they drink, so troughs should be cleaned regularly- new style troughs which can tip on hinges make this job much easier!

In summary, the more we can increase water and feed intake, the better the yields we will achieve. If you would like any further help or advice on this then give us a call!





Practical on-farm learning for a sustainable future

Upcoming Courses:

- **Practical AI: DEFRA approved 3 day course** hosted by Sarah at Smerrill Dairy, Kemble. Consisting of theory training on all aspects of AI, including heat detection and semen handling, practical training on loading a straw, tract handling and the process of AI. Held monthly, spaces available **13th-15th October** and 8th-10th December. £495+VAT
- Foot trimming: 2 day course covering theory and practical training in the Dutch 5 Step Method and lesion identification and treatment. £324+VAT. Various dates and locations. Enquiries to the farm office if interested or email sarah.metcalfe@georgevetgroup.co.uk



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