



# A COW-SIDE INVESTIGATION INTO FEED DISAPPEARANCE

**Numerous 'culprits' exist on dairy farms, robbing herd performance and injuring the dairy's bottom line. Identifying and arresting the offender isn't always easy, and often requires a full investigation, gathering and analyzing evidence on the farm and in the lab. This month's investigator uncovers issues that might impact feed inventory management.**

## Investigation

A Midwest dairy was facing challenges with its feed inventory. They would regularly order feed according to the rations developed by their nutritionist, but continually would run out of key ingredients each month. Feed costs were all over the board despite animal numbers being relatively constant. The dairy had two or three feeders, two mixers and used scales and feed sheets.

The first step of the investigation was to evaluate feed intake. Dry matter intake (DMI) was pinpointed by analyzing how much the cows were eating along with actual refusals. Next, a review of the accuracy of each feeder including time spent loading feed, time delivering feed and overall mixing time and how these factors influence patterns of DMI were evaluated.

## Findings

Through this evaluation, the farm



discovered they were overfeeding cows and refusals were higher than expected. They discovered that one feeder would often take a coffee break while the mixer was mixing; this was resulting in an over-mixed ration leading to additional refusals.

They also discovered that the weekend feeder would substitute different ingredients and often failed to make note of changes. As a result feed inventories were continuously thrown off.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation, the herd invested in feed management software to track feed refusals along with operator accuracy and to manage feed inventory. Now the dairy can look at the "actual ingredient usage" report for a month compared to the amount delivered to the farm for that time period. The improved accuracy of feeding commodities paid for the investment in the software program within three months.

After the system was in place, the operation realized they were also facing a problem with shrink; approximately 20% of one commodity was being lost. This prodded them to put in a bin system for the ingredient, rather than continuing to use the commodity bay shed for it. As a result, the herd eliminated an entire truck load of this ingredient being delivered on farm each month.

If you buy a large portion of your ration, a feed management system can be a logical fit as it improves accuracy of ingredient mixture, while helping control inventory.



*Feed management software can be a beneficial tool to improve the accuracy of a feeding program by tracking feed refusals, operator accuracy and to manage feed inventory.*

This dairy can now track what is needed to feed for the coming year and better prepare for what's ahead. Overall, good feeding practices leads to good production.

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*Each month, DairyBusiness Communications checks the case files of dairy 'investigators' to uncover 'CSI-Dairy' mysteries.*