

Carbohydrate Feeding: A Dairy Producer's Perspective

Dana M. Allen, Ph.D.

Gar-Lin Dairy Farms, Inc., Eyota, MN

Background

Gar-Lin Dairy Farms, Inc. currently consists of 1,100 cows on 3X milking with 45% BST use. We have a 30,985 RHA with a 25% culling rate. All heifers and cows remain under our management and nutritional scheme. We grow our heifers on an accelerated growth program with an average age at calving of 23 months.

My position on the farm is as an owner with specific responsibility to manage the dairy herd and its employees. With a Ph.D. in ruminant nutrition, I also serve as our nutritionist. Coupling these responsibilities gives me a birds eye view of what occurs day-to-day on the dairy and the impact of small changes in DM, feed delivery, feed push-ups, transitioning forages, and intentional diet changes. Starch and sugar components in the diet become the largest challenge when forage quality and feeding consistency is not achieved.

The key to our success is consistency for all aspects of milk harvest: milking protocols, cow handling, feeding, treatment protocols, reproduction protocols, tracking follow-up treatments, calf and heifer feeding. At our level of production, even the slightest change takes days to recover milk production.

1. Forage Harvest and Management

Optimum Harvest of Haylage and Corn Silage – Most important is harvest moisture and harvest quality. No feed ingredient can correct poorly fermented feeds.

Let New Ensiled Forages Go Through the Fermentation Cycle – 2.5 weeks is our minimum on haylage; 6 weeks minimum on corn silage but would prefer 9 weeks.

Hybrid Selection – Look to be in the top tier of hybrids in terms of fiber digestibility. Hybrids selected must fit your management capabilities and forage usage.

2. Consistency

Feeding Consistency – Do you know if the diet being fed matches the diet on paper? Utilize tools available that improve batch consistency such as EZ Feed and Feed Watch programs. Offer performance incentives to ensure consistency.

Fresh Feed Everyday – Don't shortcut on cleaning up yesterday's feed.

3. Management Details

Transitioning Forages – Never underestimate the importance of making small changes in feedstuffs. This is applicable for new ingredients or simply switching forage piles, crops, or feeding side.

Manage Starch Fermentability Changes – As fermented feeds are allowed to sit undisturbed, the cell wall softens and the hull of the kernel becomes more pliable. Are these changes the real reason for the "Spring DA's"?

Balance Diets for What Can Be Measured Consistently – It is difficult to achieve maximum production if diets are balanced based on nutrients that are not consistently measured.



Take Good Samples – Without a good sample used for nutrient analysis, results are useless.

Watch the Cows! – Nothing on paper can compensate for just taking the time to watch the cows!

