

AMS Feeding August 2021

ASK AN EXPERT

Experts:

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QUESTION

I have heard a lot of conflicting things about feeding pellets within the AMS. Do you have any recommendations on what to feed, if anything, how much, and/or any feeding strategies that will encourage voluntary use and less fetching of stubborn cows?

ANSWER

Feeding strategies for cows milked in automatic milking systems (AMS) allow producers to manage cows on a daily individual cow level. This means that feed tables can be designed to offer more feed or less feed to specific cows, depending on their individual days in milk (DIM) or milk production. Though this topic is relatively novel in terms of research, we do know that feed in the form of a concentrate is needed to motivate cows to be milked voluntarily.

Feed table design to promote voluntary visits, milk production and ideal body condition throughout lactation is important to prevent production losses, over conditioning or future transition cow challenges. One thing to consider is that with increasing feed quantities offered in the AMS, several research studies have demonstrated that intake of partial mixed ration (PMR) at the feed bunk is reduced. In addition, the feed intake in the AMS across days becomes more variable. The amount of feed cows can consume daily within the AMS is dependant on number of visits to the AMS and the palatability of feed(s) offered. Cows can consume larger quantities of pelleted feeds relative to other feed types, though optimal feed types offered within an AMS are still being researched. Feeds with minimal fines and good taste are best at promoting visits to the AMS.

Success of your feeding plan is dependent not only on feed offered within the AMS, but also the health of cows. Ensuring optimal hoof, udder, transition health and overall herd health will promote voluntary visits to the AMS and reduce the incidences of fetching cows. Facility designs such as traffic flow (free-, guided-, forced- traffic flow and milk or feed first), retrofit barn versus a new facility and management styles may also influence cow behaviours (milking and feeding) within the barn. Fetching of heifers, fresh cows or cows new to being milked on an AMS can be done to train or introduce cows to the AMS to encourage future visit attendance.

When deciding what type or quantity of feed to offer and when (DIM, milk yield), it is important to consult with both your nutrition consultant and your AMS dealer to optimally execute your chosen feeding strategy.