

## Feeding in and after flood

# Converting feed into milk not waste

**Your aim must be to ensure that as much of the feed you have bought is actually eaten and not wasted during storage and feed-out.**

**The key things to do are:**

- **Look for low-cost ways to improve your feed storage facilities to minimise feed spoilage and wastage costs**
- **If you don't already have a permanent feedpad, set up an area for feeding fodder / mixed rations to cows while your pastures regenerate**
- **Ensure you have a simple, efficient daily feed-out routine in place that everyone on the farm knows how to implement safely while your pastures and feed crops regenerate.**

### Look at your feed storage options

Inexpensive feed storage facilities can work well in the short term, but they usually involve higher feed spoilage and wastage costs. Wasted feed could be more expensive than some concrete or other materials.

Other storage factors to consider are:

- Will you purchase dry meals? These need to be kept dry and are subject to wind loss.
- Will you purchase wet foodstuffs? How quickly will each delivery be used?
- Risk of mycotoxins (fungal toxins).
- Do you have good year-round delivery access?
- Where are the powerlines? Is it a safe delivery area?
- Feed contamination with stones and dirt can be a problem if you don't have a concrete base.

### Set up a suitable area for feeding fodder / mixed rations

If you don't already have a permanent feedpad, consider setting up a feed-out area that ensures more feed is eaten, and less wasted, and provides a productive, healthy and safe environment for people and cows.

You don't have to spend big dollars to establish a flexible feeding system that will help you achieve higher feed intakes and better control over diets, reduce feed wastage, keep cows off pastures as they are regenerating, more easily group cows, and cope better with wet winter conditions. However, you need to be prepared to manage the increased risk of cow health problems such as mastitis and lameness.

For \$50-\$100/cow,\* you can fairly quickly and easily set up a semi-permanent feed-out area with a compacted surface that has low-cost troughing, such as conveyor belting, second-hand water troughs or other materials from clearing sales. If necessary, the facility can be relocated to another site on the farm (with a bit of effort).

Grains2Milk's feed wastage research project indicates that even a basic feed-out facility could reduce feed wastage from up to 30+%, as seen when feeding on bare ground using hay rings or old tractor tyres to as low as 10-15%, so it is worth crunching the numbers – you may be surprised how short the payback period is on such an investment after you estimate the value of the feed being wasted in your current system.

\* For feed-out area only and not associated equipment, including carts, wagons and tractors.

# Minimising feed wastage during storage and feed-out



## Down to details

Consider the following when selecting the best site for a feed-out area:

- Soils and topography
- Orientation with respect to shade/wind
- Access to dairy, farm laneways, feed storage, vehicles
- Site services such as water, power, drains, channels
- Ease of effluent handling
- Proximity to waterways, houses, neighbours
- Potential to scale up in future
- Further development that is likely around the site.

Consider these minimum dimensions when designing your feed-out area:

- Water
  - 120 to 150 L/cow/day (double in hot weather).
  - 75 mm diameter pipe to deliver 20 L/cow/hour.
  - Minimum 0.75 m/cow water trough space.
- Feed space
  - Minimum 0.75 m/cow feed trough space.
- Feed area
  - 9-10 m<sup>2</sup>/cow in feeding area.
  - Minimum slope of 1:500, maximum slope of 1:20.
  - 5 m wide access track for safety.

## Do I really need a mixer wagon?

A silage cart can be adequate, even if you have a high-production herd, but it limits the types of feed ingredients you can use.

A mixer wagon allows you to use a range of wet and dry ingredients and materials of a finer particle size, as well as long materials. Diets can be formulated more accurately.

*Mixer wagons don't produce more milk  
– better feeding does.*

## Consider the people who must make the system work

Flexible feeding systems introduce new tasks, different work routines and potential safety hazards compared to pasture-based feeding.

When you are selecting what type of feed-out area and method best suits your circumstances, be sure to consider who will have to make it work effectively day-to-day. There is often a worthwhile compromise between what is technically the best system and what you can implement simply. Remember the 'keep it simple' rule. Your choices may make the difference between you being able to get off the farm readily for a break or being tied to it because you are the only one who can do the job right.

## Work schedules and new skills

Once you have established your new feeding system, it is important to delegate roles and responsibilities, and train team members if new skills and procedures are involved.

## Monitoring the feeding system

Apart from actually mixing and delivering feed, you need to regularly monitor the feeding system for effectiveness and efficiency. Having written records of the quantities of all feed ingredients delivered by suppliers and all feeds mixed and fed to stock is important to avoid an embarrassing feed shortage or a belated, unaccounted bill to pay.

## Prioritise safety

People, machinery and cows share the same space on the feeding area. Do you have a system that ensures everyone's safety?

Visit Murray Dairy's website ([www.murraydairy.com.au](http://www.murraydairy.com.au)) for more information about:

- Tips on how to minimise wastage during feed-out
- A summary report on the Grains2Milk Feed Wastage Study (50 farms)
- Guidelines for measuring feed wastage on your farm