

# Taste of success has generated positive momentum at this dairy

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*Editor's note: Luciana Jonkman, nutrition and management consultant with Progressive Dairy Solutions Inc., shares some of the success experienced at one of her client dairies in California.*

When I started working for the dairy, it was winter. We had just gone through a split in partnership and now needed to regroup. There was a lot of pressure emotionally and financially to succeed. When I looked at what I was taking on, I searched for the weakest link and what would get the biggest bang (fastest return on investment) for the buck. We listed the top three areas and started checking off. We started with transition cow movements, feed management, and then cow comfort. You could argue the order we went in, but with three very talented and eager guys managing the work on this 1,500-milk-cow operation, I needed to find a place for each of them to succeed.

Prior to hiring me as their nutritionist and management consultant, the dairy had been moving close-up cows four to six times in the three weeks leading up to calving. I can't speak to why this was happening, but when I discussed the change with the new management it was a no-brainer that we would stop the moves. Today, we move cows from a far-off dry pen to a close-up pen, and the day she is calving (or as close to calving as possible to that day) we move her again to the calving pen.

We also attacked silage management.

As we moved from winter to spring, we turned to feed planning. The dairy had traditionally calculated 20 to 25 percent shrink in silages and factored that in when purchasing feed from nearby farmers. I was shocked that it was commonplace to absorb those kinds of losses. In reality, I see lots of situations where this level of shrink is accepted, but not talked about.

So, I showed them the differences in cash outlay and feed usability between 10 to 15 percent shrink and 25 percent shrink. The numbers were staggering, and very quickly the dairymen wanted to know how they could avoid these losses. We pulled the harvesters, myself and the dairymen together and made a plan. We decided we would do a lot of things differently:

- Use Silo Stop to reduce mold and improve fermentation.
- Put an additional tractor on the pit to pack it tighter and get more feed in the very limited footprint we have to work with.
- Put two pits up so that we could move faster through the first one while we split forage in the ration between corn silo & oat silo.
- Laser level a 140-by-295-foot dirt patch (currently a junk pile behind the commodity barn) to put up our first drive-over pile comprised of oatlage.

What we have learned through this process is that we can do better!

With the first oatlage pile, we measured the shrink and were excited to learn that it was 13 percent, down from an expected 25 percent. Now, we have calculated what a reduction in shrink from 25 percent to 15 percent would do on all silages and are pouring another slab of concrete with the money saved. We also plan at least one more new slab of concrete for the drive-over pile currently on dirt. We expect that the inventory previously purchased for 12 months will now last 13 to 14 months, and our banker likes that. By reducing shrink, we can now allocate more acres to the production of feeds like earlage, making the dairy even more self-sufficient and profitable.

The dairymen are very excited and want to continue making improvements in all areas of the operation.

Bottom-line: The dairymen have seen lots of success in the eight short months they have been solely responsible for the herd, farm ground and facilities. By rallying the troops, they have contributed to the fantastic position they are in today and for the future of their dairy business. It has been fun to see them do what they love and work together as a family.