

Management Update

Cattle Preconditioning: Bunk Management Can Improve Daily Gains

Research has shown that using a bunk management system can reduce waste and dramatically improve daily gains and feed efficiency when calves are fed a feedlot type (80 to 100 percent grain) ration. Calves need a minimum of 14 inches of feed bunk per calf and a minimum of 200 square feet of feedlot space per calf.

Following two simple rules should keep cattle eating a consistent amount each day. The first rule is to not increase feed until two consecutive days pass where no feed is left in the bunk.

Also, do not decrease feed unless 25 percent or more of the feed is remaining. The second rule is to never increase or decrease the feeding amount by more than 10 percent at one time. Observe the bunks at the same time each day.

In addition, feed must be accurately weighed to determine how much feed to offer the calves each day. Bunk management is equally important whether using self feeders or hand feeding a few pounds each day, as delivering a balanced diet and minimizing waste is a component of bunk management. Knowing how much feed the cattle are consuming on a daily basis is key to making feed deliveries the next day. Record this information every day and use it to adjust feeding amounts. Obviously, accurately weighing the feed each day is critical to a bunk management system.

Many of the bunk management principles apply to self feeders. They cannot be filled with feed and then forgotten. Check feeders on a daily basis. Check to see if fines are building up in the bottom of the trough. Fines are a major cause of bloat and are not palatable to cattle. Make sure

feed is flowing in the feeders, and never let cattle run out of feed. Cattle will overeat when the feeders are refilled, and this can lead to acidosis. Make sure to clean out any spoiled feed, which is especially important in wet weather. Do not let stale feed build up in the bunks over time. When this feed is cleaned out and fresh feed is available, cattle may gorge themselves, leading to severe digestive problems.

Feed calves at approximately the same time every day. Calves should be hungry at this time each day, and sickness can be detected when calves do not come up to eat or are very slow coming to the bunk. Calves can usually be fed once per day, but they may need twice per day feeding in rainy weather. Clean bunks each day and remove feed that is stale, spoiled and/or wet, and remove any fines or trash. *Source: University Of Georgia Ag Extension* ■