

## Is It Really That Complicated?

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Sometimes you just want a straight answer. Why does it seem like that is so hard to come by? Yes or no, black or white, right or wrong. But that is too easy, we live and work in a world where the answer always seems to “depend” on some other factor. With the abundance that the free market provides, it also creates choices. Choices are always good to have – but it does create complications.

Recently I was in a meeting with a dairyman and a large local farmer. The farmer was trying to ascertain what forages he could grow that would be the most beneficial to the dairy. Well maybe not most beneficial to the dairy, because corn silage would be the most beneficial but water was limiting so what would be most beneficial, other than corn silage? “Wheat silage” he suggested? Okay I thought, for the right price we could feed quite a bit of wheat silage and maybe even experiment with a little wheat grain as well. “So how much will wheat silage be worth this year and maybe the next three years?” Seems like a reasonable question, but it really depends on how competitive ingredients are priced. “How many tons would you feed? How many acres would need to be planted?” Well it depends I told him on corn silage price, grain price, hay price, yield...He threw his hands up in the air and said “just give me a price!” When we gave him a price that would entice the dairy to feed wheat silage (and take into account the risk involved in pricing a single ingredient 3 years in advance) in such a quantity that would make it worthwhile for him to grow it, the price was so low that it insulted the farmer and he said there was no way he could afford to grow it for that amount. So we know now corn silage takes too much water, and wheat silage needs to be priced so low that neither are currently good alternatives for the farmer. Maybe we are making progress!

There is no single feedstuff that is irreplaceable in a dairy ration. We don’t have to feed alfalfa hay, or corn silage or corn for that matter – there are alternatives. Alternative rations may not yield the same amount of milk production as the ideal ration, but if the reduction in ration costs offsets the loss of production and your income over feed cost is better with the alternative ration isn’t that the best ration to be feeding?

The amount of feed inventory on the dairy also has a great deal to do with what a dairyman is willing to pay for feed currently. Inventory is leverage when it comes to negotiating. When you don’t *have* to have it - it is amazing how much cheaper it gets. Obviously that is a luxury that dairymen don’t always have, but that concept is for a different article.

The take home message for this article is this – Cows are amazing creatures, don’t fall in love with specific ingredients, let the economics determine feed ingredients in the ration, a little less milk for a lot less cost makes you more money and that undoubtedly will go Straight To Your Bottom Line!