

How Much is That Feed Worth?

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I would guess dairymen get tired of their consulting nutritionist replying to the question of “How much is that feed worth?” by saying “Well it depends.” But, honestly that is more often than not, the best answer. Each dairy is unique in its location, farming philosophy, ingredient purchasing prowess, willingness to take risks, relationship with other producers, etc... All of which impact how much a certain ingredient is worth. Many times there are opportunities to buy a particular ingredient that is based solely on the nutrient composition of that feed, therefore it makes sense to purchase – and it would be a bad decision. Conversely, there are times when ingredients are overpriced relative to their nutrient contribution – but because of the uniqueness of the particular dairy, it still has value at the higher price.

For example, Junior buys an old pick-up truck and needs to rebuild the engine. He starts the rebuild and finds out that he is going to need to purchase a few tools in order to complete the rebuild properly. He goes down to the local NAPA and notices they are having a sale on 1/2” wrenches and 5/8” wrenches, in fact they are so cheap he buys two of each. He goes back home and starts making progress removing parts from the old engine but when he gets to the valve covers he figures out that he needs a 9/16” wrench! Dang it, the 9/16” wrench was not on sale, so he did not buy one. His dad comes by and tells him do not waste money on buying that expensive 9/16” wrench, “figure out a way to make the 1/2” or 5/8” work.” They are cheaper and he has two of them so surely there is a way to make one of them fit a 9/16” bolt right? Junior takes his father’s advice and doesn’t go buy the wrench that would fit because it was more expensive relative to the other wrenches he purchased. After a few weeks, Junior decides he will just rebuild everything else, because he just cannot make the other wrenches fit. Whatever is found underneath the valve covers is probably okay anyway and his new truck is ready to go, except it still blows a little black smoke and seems to have a miss when he tries to accelerate. Junior did not however overpay for the 9/16” wrench.

The moral of the story is this; cows do not care how much feed ingredients cost. They have a requirement for very specific nutrients in order to produce at a certain level. Our job as nutritionists and dairymen is to supply the proper tools they need at a given time so they can produce at the highest level. When we do not give them what they need the result will be limited. We shouldn’t buy feed ingredients based on their value compared to other ingredients. We need to purchase feed ingredients based on their value to the cow. Obviously, there are opportunities to take advantage of “good buys” on feed ingredients and we certainly need to maximize those opportunities. But, do not forget the simple fact that just because it is cheap does make it “a 9/16” wrench.” Neither a 1/2” nor a 5/8” wrench is going to do you a bit of good; no matter how cheap they are, if the cow needs a 9/16”!

Give her the proper tools to work with she will produce like a well-oiled machine and no doubt that will go Straight to Your Bottom Line.