Prime Cuts:
Slick Bunk Management

Nutritionists and cattle raisers alike focus heavily on balanced rations, getting right down to grams of X and Y nutrients, but delivery of that feed is just as important. Successfully feeding cattle relies on walking the line between over- and under-feeding. Underfeeding limits performance and overfeeding is expensive and wasteful.

Commercial feeders have turned to *Slick Bunk* feed management. This approach requires the producer to closely watch and "read" the bunk to best match the amount fed out to the amount consumed. Unlike feeding to provide a certain percentage of refusals, slick bunk strategy results in less wasted feed for similar average daily gains. Cattle in this type of feeding system may also have fewer bouts of subclinical acidosis due to the limited possibility of overconsumption.

Slick bunk management requires monitoring of how much feed was provided along with how much feed was consumed and how the cattle are behaving. To help producers read their bunks, Dr Robbi Pritchard (SDSU) developed the SDSU Feedbunk Scoring System. This allows managers to take what they visually see and convert it into simple, objective data.

SDSU Feedbunk Scoring System	
Score	Description
0	No feed remaining in bunk.
0.5	Scattered feed remaining. Most of the bottom of the bunk exposed.
1	Thin, uniform layer of feed remaining. About 1 corn kernel deep.
2	25 – 50% of feed remaining.
3	More than 50% of feed remaining. Crown is thoroughly disturbed.
4	Feed is virtually untouched. Crown of feed still noticeable.

When utilizing this management style certain guidelines should be followed:

1. Bunks should be read at the same time each day.
2. Feed amounts should only be adjusted every 3 – 5 days.
3. Do not increase feed more than 0.75 lb dry matter at a time.
4. Watch cattle behavior at feeding times. If they display aggressive behavior, it may indicate that an increase in feed is necessary.

When looking at a 10-day time span, the goal is for the score to be a zero most of the time with a few days at a 0.5 score. Use common sense when making changes. Take behavior, diet type, etc. into account. And do not forget the impact of ambient temperature. Cattle in cooler weather will tend to eat more than cattle in warmer weather. Use weather forecasts to adjust feed deliveries accordingly to decrease the incidence of rumen acidosis and performance losses.

Slick bunk feed management can be a great technique for conscientious producers but does require thorough records and supervision. Cattle should be kept on a consistent feeding schedule and should never be without food for multiple hours.

Famo Feeds • 446 Industrial Dr • Freeport, MN • 800-450-2145