



Unlocking the Potential for
Peak Milk

**Optimum Feed Intake
QUANTITY**

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- Basic fact #1 Cows can eat only when they have access to feed. Empty bunks do not encourage optimum feed intake.
- Basic fact #2 Cows are herd animals. They prefer to eat together and lie down together. A feed bunk may be present 24/7 but cow eating behavior is cyclical.
- Regrouping cows will suppress feed intake; for mature cows usually only one day, for subordinate cows (e.g., heifers) for 2 to 4 days.
- When first lactation cows are housed separately from older cows research shows 11 to 12 percent increase in feed intake due to increased number of meals and longer feeding time.
- Percentage of headlocks filled may be expected to peak at: (in order of highest percentage)
 1. New feed delivery – highest
 2. Following return to pen from milking
 3. Feed push up between previous feed deliveries
- Based on research, cows do not fill more than 80% of 24-inch headlocks unless manually forced to fill for palpation or handling.
- Overstocking number of cows per headlock suppresses feed intake most often among most recently fresh and subordinate animals.
- Flexible group management to accommodate fluctuating calving rates (thus promoting optimum feed intake) may require extra temporary pens or changing pen sizes.

References: K. Norland and Others, "Commingling Dairy Cows: Pen Moves, Stocking Density, and Health." 39th Proceedings of Am. Assoc. Bovine Practitioners. 2006 pp 36-42. M.A.G. von Keyserlingk and Others, "Acute Behavior Effects of Regrouping Dairy Cows." Journal of Dairy Science 91:1011-1016. R. J. Grant and J. LO. Albright "Effect of Animal Grouping on Feeding Behavior and Intake of Dairy Cattle." Journal of Dairy Science 84(E. Suppl.) E156-E163.

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