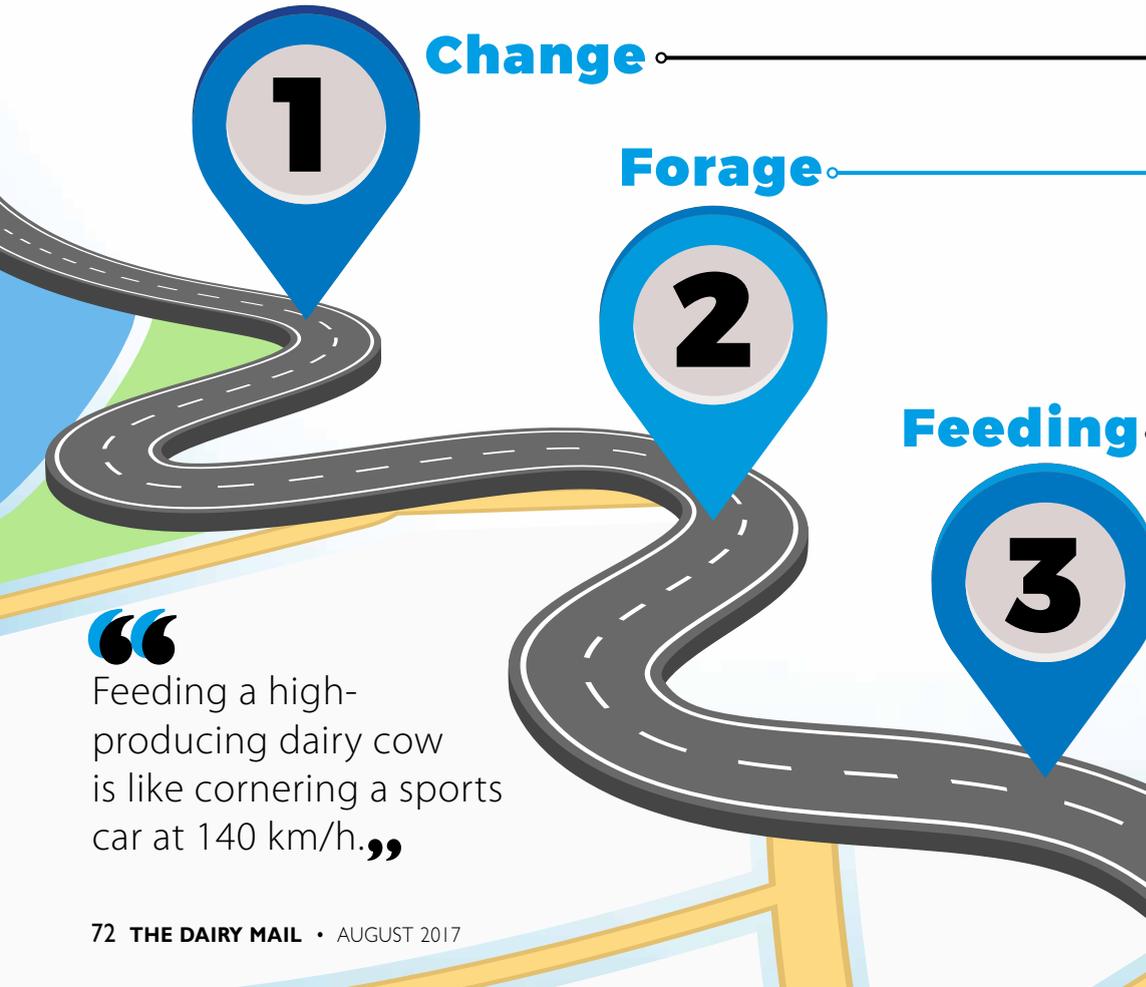


Avoid the potholes!

by Alex Jenkins

Feeding a high-producing dairy cow is like cornering a sports car at 140 km/h. It is great fun until you hit a pothole, then everything goes spectacularly wrong. Safety, nutritional safety, is a topic that is very close to my heart. Factors that endanger the quality of feed and the health of our animals must be viewed as the nasty, axle-breaking potholes that they are. There are three types of nutritional potholes: change, forage and feeding.



“Change anything you want, as long as the cow doesn’t notice.”
- Prof. John Fetrow

- Small changes to a good ration are easily absorbed; big changes are not appreciated.
- Change one thing at a time and wait two weeks before making another change.
- Change and monitor, change and monitor. After a change to your ration, check rumen fill, manure consistency, intakes and milk production daily for the next two to three weeks.

- Check forage cut lengths (2,5 cm to 5 cm) and quality.
- Check your blades weekly and replace when necessary.
- Consider a softer form of forage, e.g. lucerne, grass and sorghum.
- Blend silage bunker tails over two weeks to minimise sudden changes to the ration.
- Draw a silage map. Analyse all bunkers early in the season and then formulate a plan to keep the best quality for the most sensitive groups and for when you need it most.
- Always make too much. Plan your tonnage on a 400 to 450-day year and 15% shrinkage. This will give you a buffer and give you top-quality silage all year round.
- Cut and fill as fast as you can (without compromising compaction) so that you do not start with 25% dry matter (DM) in the first bunkers and end with 45% DM in the last.

Routine, routine, routine

- Routine feeding times. Cows can’t handle a badly managed routine. If they are hungry when you feed them, they will slug feed and upset their rumen balance, which damages production.
- Routine milk temperature. If you must feed cold milk to your calves, then always feed cold milk.
- Routine, high-quality colostrum.

CONCLUSION

By diligently keeping an eye out for nutritional potholes, we are able to avoid the excitement of feeding disasters and go back to the routine task of making money, living our lives and enjoying our cows.

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