



by John Goeser

Corn grain and canola meal are not equal, either

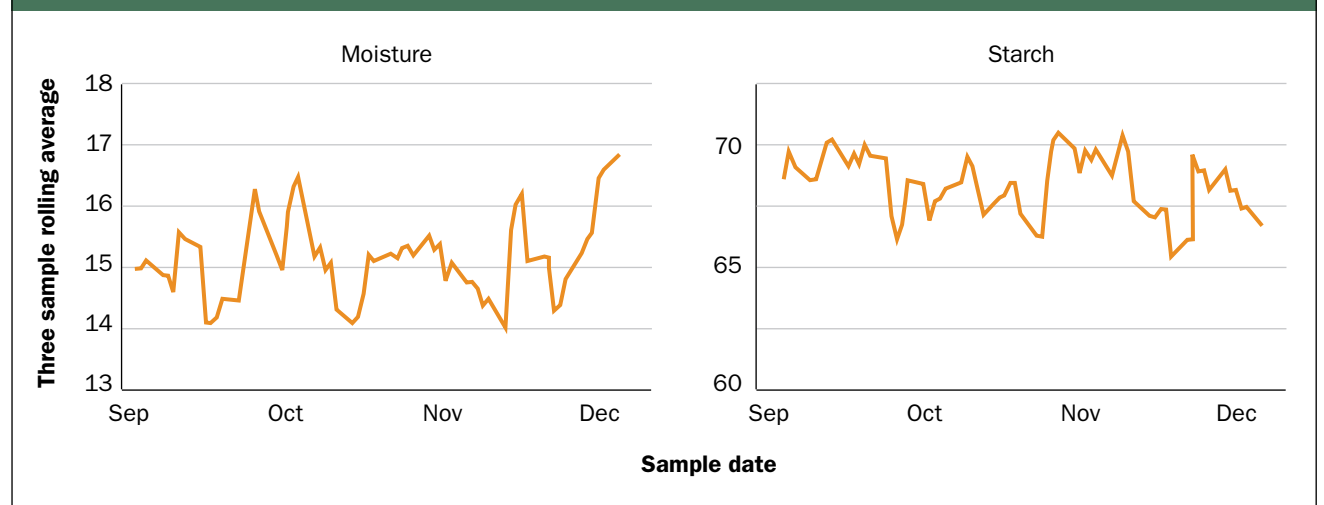
AS I often do, I like following in the footsteps of thought leaders and big shoes. This time around, I'm trailing Mike Hutjens. Earlier this month, we covered carbon and sustainability program issues in this column. While I was tempted to stay on this topic for this second article in January, reading Hutjens' article in the November issue titled "Corn distillers grains are not equal" yanked me back to covering feed ingredient inconsistencies. Let's follow Hutjens' lead and further explore purchased feed variability.

Cracking the CDG code

Back in November, Hutjens cited the dairy ration model National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's (NASEM) 2021 feed library to introduce the range in nutrition value associated with unique corn distillers grains (CDG) ingredients. In the CDG ingredient world, there are vastly different milling and ethanol production processes that lead to different CDG ingredient and nutrition value outcomes. These CDG ingredients are so unique that we could almost reclassify them as different products entirely, despite them all originating from shelled corn.

Hutjens cited research to demonstrate how energy-corrected milk production and feed conversion efficiency are affected by CDG options. While it's reasonable to assume that alternative grain fermenting or processing techniques affect nutritional value, we don't tend to look for ranging nutrition value in other commodities such as corn grain or canola meal. We account for the fact that these feeds contribute energy or protein to the diet, but we don't necessarily focus on any meaningful variability that could exist within each feed ingredient. With over five years of experience now in hand, I can confidently advise that

Figure 1. Moving average moisture and starch in corn grain



there are substantial economic opportunities lying in the weeds within our purchased feeds.

Missed opportunities

We've uncovered feed cost opportunities, working in concert with forward thinking dairies that regularly test any feed ingredient fed at greater than 3 pounds per cow per day. When I broke into the nutrition world over 15 years ago, I'd regularly sample CDG, corn gluten, and other commodity feeds fed at 3 pounds or more in the diets I'd formulate. However, the laboratory analyses were expensive and time consuming. Today, thanks to expanded commercial feed analysis methods, sampling commodities is no different than forages. Let's look at some farm specific examples with corn grain or canola meal.

In the past, I'd described how a crop year or alternative suppliers can influence commodity quality. For further context and reading, reference my April 10, 2022, Feed Fundamentals column titled, "Don't allow variation to become a cliché." Drilling down deeper now in 2025 and

on the heels of Hutjens' article, let's consider a couple of real world examples that offer a more granular, real world view of how moisture, protein, or starch content can fluctuate over time in other commodity feeds.

Fluctuating values

The figure here represents real world corn grain moisture and starch swings over periods of time. You can trust these trend lines are not an anomaly, as other dairies have uncovered similar meaningful trends in canola meal and other commodities as well as corn. We've regularly found 2- to 3-unit swings over time in moisture and nutrients, equivalent to around 0.2 pound feed value per cow, when fed at 6 to 8 pounds per cow.

This might not seem like much, but it's 20 pounds for every 100 cows! Think about the feed cost ramifications in moisture alone. The nutrient changes over time are equally impactful, if not more so. In the future, there will be automated solutions to account for these subtle moisture and nutrient changes in

feeds that are constantly happening. I expect future technologies will supercharge your nutritionists' formulated diet potential and continue improving feed conversion efficiency while reducing emissions and a carbon footprint.

Similar to what Hutjens uncovered with corn distillers grains, realize that there are unique differences and economic opportunities hidden in other purchased feeds. These are just two examples to capture your attention, but my experience has uncovered equally meaningful trends with nearly all other commodity feeds we include at 3 pounds or more per cow. Now, follow Hutjens' and my lead in accounting for these in your nutrition program this new year. 🐮

The author is the animal nutrition director at Rock River Lab Inc., in Watertown, Wis., an adjunct professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a consultant with Cows Agree Consulting LLC.

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