



Charlotte dairy producer Benjie Daniel is seeing impressive results after a six-month feed trial conducted at his 1,500-acre, 215-cow farm. Based on Daniel's available forages, the custom program also utilized a feed additive developed by Tennessee Farmers Cooperative in partnership with ag technology company, AB Vista.

# Milking pounds

A Co-op custom feed program is helping Charlotte dairyman Benjie Daniel increase production

Story and photos by Mark E. Johnson

**S**ometimes, the key to success is all in the details. In dairy terms, that often refers to the nutrition.

As the Tennessee dairy industry grapples with high grain prices, producers like Charlotte dairyman Benjie Daniel are looking to milk every possible pound out of their feed programs. A custom feeding program developed by Co-op nutritionists in the fall of 2020 is helping Daniel get the most out of his inputs.

"This is one of the top reasons why I do business with the Co-op," says Daniel, a longtime member of United Farm and Home Co-op, in Dickson, and a current Tennessee Farmers Cooperative (TFC) director. "They provide a huge advantage over what I might get from a paid consultant working on behalf of some other feed mill. Co-op is the entire package, and feed consultation is just another valuable service they provide."

Daniel explains that last September, Todd Steen and Gary Williams — TFC nutritionist and area livestock specialist, respectively —

contacted him about trying a new forage and feed additive program at his 1,500-acre, 215-cow Charlotte dairy.

"My dad and I had taken part in several Co-op trials over the years," Daniel says of his late father, Johnny, who also served as a TFC director. "We were usually happy to be involved, because, at the very least, they always end up getting some good research out of it, and very often, the trials would result in an improvement to our operation."

This trial would be no exception, both in research and improvements.

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“We came to Benjie with a proposal that we hoped would increase his profitability,” says Williams. “We speculated that the combination of his existing forages and his excellent management practices would work well with the program we had in mind.”

Steen and Williams proposed a six-month trial period during which the new feed additive — originally developed in cooperation with AB Vista, an international animal nutrition technology company — would be mixed into Daniel’s custom ration at TFC’s LaVergne feed mill. Simultaneously, Steen and Williams would closely monitor changes in the dairy’s forages and adjust as needed. They would also factor in other variables like the addition of fresh cows in the milking herd and changes in the composition of the milk itself. All of these variables would be carefully recorded and studied to determine whether they created an increase in milk production and, most importantly, a substantial return on investment for Daniel.

“If you’re going to invest in something, it has to pay off,” says Steen. “That’s our end-goal. And just because you introduce a new product [into the feeding program], you don’t know if it’s really doing anything unless you can measure it daily. AB Vista, as one of our many great partners, was instrumental in helping us with those measurements.”

Steen describes the product (still unnamed at presstime) as an all-natural extract from the germination of specific

grains that, in this case, helps the animal digest the forage components of a typical dairy ration.

“Over the past few years, we have conducted some basic trials at CRF (Cooperative Research Farms) to examine these types of extract products,” says Steen. “The research has been very positive. Although additives like these may not be right for every operation, we thought that — with Benjie’s forage makeup — it would help his cows be more efficient in the process of digestion. We formulated it as a dry product that would mix well with his custom ration right there at the feed mill, which made it easier on Benjie. But most of all, it had to pay.”

And it did. Steen’s data show conclusively that over the six-month trial, Daniel’s daily herd average went from around 68 pounds to over 85 pounds per animal. Steen estimates that the feed additive is responsible for approximately 30 percent of that increase. Based on milk prices and feed costs at the time, this translated into a return on investment (ROI) of three to one. The numbers also showed that over that six-month period, the dairy saw a total ROI better than eight to one.

“Now, there are many variables that could’ve — and probably did — contribute to this improvement, including weather conditions, changes in forage quality, fresh cows coming onto the line, and so on,” Steen says. “It’s difficult to quantify all of it. But we know that the feed additive cre-

ated a positive return for Benjie and that the program as a whole was successful.”

Williams says he sees the trial as an example of matching the correct technology with the right farmer and operation.

“We’re always looking for something that may help a dairy operation utilize their forages more efficiently, make their cattle produce more milk, and create more profit for the farmer,” Williams says. “This additive, in particular, is just another tool that has the potential to do that. It may not work in every instance, but if the conditions are right, it just might.”

For a feed consultation, contact the specialists at your local Co-op.

## Benjie Daniel’s feed choices

**Bottle calves** — Milk from the dairy

**Small calves** — Co-op Calf Primer/TCR 1-Rum (#93115PE)

**Lactating cows** — Custom feed mixed at TFC’s LaVergne Feed Mill, based on available forages

**Dry Cows** — Co-op Dry Cow Prep (#229PE)

**Other** — 14% Pelleted Beef Feed with Rumensin (#94339PE)



LEFT: Daniel’s milking herd went from a 68-pound herd average to better than 85 pounds. TFC nutritionist Todd Steen attributes approximately 30 percent of this gain to the all-natural extract added to Daniel’s custom blend at the LaVergne feed mill. RIGHT: From left, Steen, TFC livestock specialist Gary Williams, and Daniel look over data compiled from the feed study.