

# HOW TO STORE AND HANDLE WHOLE COTTONSEED

When it comes to feed ingredients, few can compete with whole cottonseed for lactating dairy cattle. As a triple nutrient feedstuff containing protein, high energy and high fiber, cottonseed is proven to support milk production and boost butterfat. To maximize these nutritional benefits, it's important to store and handle cottonseed properly.

## STORAGE

"The key to storing cottonseed is that it must be covered," said Tom Wedegaertner, director of cottonseed research, Cotton Incorporated. "The best way to store it is in a flat, covered structure that is accessible by bucket loader, like a commodity shed."

Commodity sheds are the most common storage choice on dairy farms. With strong sides and a sturdy roof, they can effectively prevent most rain and precipitation from blowing in. The only caution about commodity sheds is the "first in, last out" flow of product.

"Dairymen must be diligent about getting all the way to the back of the commodity bay and cleaning it out before they add another load," shared Wedegaertner. "Otherwise, they'll have some seed sitting in the back that may be several truckloads old."



Whole cottonseed in a commodity shed.

Silage bags, or ag bags, are another effective way to protect cottonseed from the environment and maintain quality. However, cottonseed can't be packed the way silage normally would because it requires a looser, lighter pack. Instead, many dairymen use finger packer bags, grain baggers or large augers to fill them.

## MOISTURE CONTROL

No matter the method of storage, keeping cottonseed dry should be the top priority. If it's stored at a high moisture level, it will mold, spoil and have the potential to catch fire. The ideal moisture level for storage is 10% or less.

"I consider 10-13% moisture a caution zone," said Wedegaertner. "Anything above 13% has the potential to mold. Its free fatty acids are going to increase, and it's not going to store well at all."

The seed's origin can have a large impact on its moisture level. The dry climate of Texas typically leads to low-moisture cottonseed. However, seed coming out of the Southeast is less of a guarantee so dairymen ordering seed from that region should be diligent in working with a good broker and a good seed supplier to make sure they're getting quality seed.

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## FORWARD CONTRACTING

If cottonseed is below the 10% moisture benchmark and is kept cool and dry, it can be stored for up to a year. However, maintaining optimal storage conditions for large loads long term can be a challenge.

“Cottonseed is cheapest at harvest time, so people are tempted to buy a bunch of it when it’s cheap and store it themselves, but that’s a risky proposition,” explained Wedegaertner. “With forward contracting and forward delivery, they can shift the responsibility of storing the seed, keeping it dry and maintaining the quality to someone else.”

Rather than having all the seed delivered at one time, forward contracting provides a more convenient delivery schedule, allowing dairymen to use it as it comes for a fresher, more effective feedstuff.



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## NOTES FOR HANDLING

- ➔ As far as keeping it dry, cool and sheltered, whole cottonseed is similar to other commodity ingredients. The biggest difference is that bulk equipment like bucket loaders are needed for handling since it doesn’t flow or auger.
- ➔ Spontaneous combustion of cottonseed is possible, but not a high risk on the dairy farm level. Keeping cottonseed dry and protected will mitigate the risk.
- ➔ Cottonseed should be stored below 10% moisture. As a quick test, pinch the seed between your fingers. If it’s hard like a sunflower seed, it’s good to go. If it’s soft, it’s likely too wet and will not store well.

## Interested in adding whole cottonseed into your rations?

Connect with a qualified seller or customized quote on the [Cottonseed Marketplace](#).

