

Take control with forage



Roy Eastlake, Biotal National Technical Support Manager says there is a clear link between increased milk from forage and higher margins. He argues that many farmers can increase the contribution from conserved forage by planning and managing production more effectively. And by doing this they can take control of costs and create more options to manage their herd in volatile markets.

The opportunity

The most successful farmers are achieving intakes of 14kg forage DM/cow/day with an average energy content of 11.5MJ/kgDM. The average is closer to 10kg forage DM/cow/day at 10.5MJ/kgDM. What is the difference worth?

Table 1 Effect of improving silage quality and quantity on litres from forage per cow for a 200 day winter

	10kgDM	11kgDM	12kgDM	13kgDM	14kgDM
10.0MJ	1396	1773	2188	2528	2905
10.5MJ	1584	1981	2415	2773	3169
11.0MJ	1773	2188	2603	3018	3433
11.5MJ	1962	2396	2830	3264	3695

The top farmers are producing more than twice the milk from forage over a 200 day winter, worth £590/cow in extra milk or a concentrate saving of £228.

It might be unrealistic to expect a jump from average to top performance immediately, but improving forage quantity and quality should be a key business objective.



Each 1kg increase in dry matter per day will increase milk from forage by 400 litres over 200 days

Each 0.5MJ/kgDM increase will increase milk from forage by 200 litres over 200 days

Grasping the opportunity

If you know where your best opportunity to improve lies, you must focus on it to make more, better quality forage next winter. There are three basic options:

- If you are feeding less than 12kgDM/day then the opportunity is to make more.
- If you make sufficient quantities but quality is low, the focus should be on making better
- You make plenty but wastage levels are high. Review management to ensure more of what is made is fed rather than being thrown away.

Making the plan

Create a silage wedge of how much you need from each cut to hit your season's target and then monitor and react as the season unfolds. How can you manage forage production to increase the likelihood of achieving the season target? If you are ahead of target early in the season, what are your options? If you are falling behind target production, what can you do to make up the shortfall?

Plan to make more



Grazing tighter at turnout to increase the first cut acreage. This can also improve grazing output and quality



Move to a frequent interval system for grass silage, taking first cut sooner and cutting more frequently.



Reduce the forage risk and include fermented wholecrop to extend the forage area with a more flexible crop.



If maize is grown increase the area grown. If you don't grow maize, can you grow some economically?

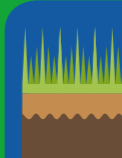


Take action to minimise field loss. Don't over wilt and ensure all cut grass is carted to the clamp

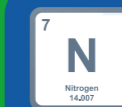
Plan to make better



Cut more frequently – cutting when the crop is at its optimum, weather allowing



Take pre-cutting samples to monitor grass quality



Tailor nitrogen applications to the planned cut dates – if cutting sooner you may need to apply less.



Selecting the right variety of maize or wholecrop can have a significant impact on yield and quality.



Focus on maximising nutrient retention. Don't compromise use a Biotal crop and condition specific inoculant to achieve a rapid and efficient fermentation to ensure as much energy and protein is retained

Cover and seal the clamp thoroughly and don't open the clamps too soon – give the fermentation time to complete and ensure the best quality, stable feed.

Plan to waste less



Use a Biotal crop and condition specific inoculant to ensure a rapid fermentation and aerobic stability.



Sheet the clamp to make it as airtight as possible.



Keep the feed face clean



Use a block cutter with sharp knives



Don't feed waste silage – it just contaminates the rest of the diet and can cause reduced intakes and nutritional problems.

