Take control with forage

BIOTAL

Plan for a quality second cut

Mid-May is a crucial time when planning forage production according to Biotal's Roy Eastlake. Reviewing what you have already made and what you still need to make will allow you to plan future cuts and make decisions about alternative forages such as wholecrop.

In some parts of the country first cuts are already in the clamp while elsewhere crops will not have been taken. Don't wait to review what is in the clamp. The quicker you calculate what you have got, the sooner and more effectively you can plan future cuts and review your total forage mix. The later you leave it, the fewer options you will have to make up any shortfall in quality forage.

Considerations for planning forage requirements

Your target to take control with forage is to make enough quality forage to last the winter, which is a balance between quantity and quality. If you make the bulk but with poor quality performance will suffer.

Targeting 12-14kg DM of forage per day at a minimum 11 MJ is the foundation of a successful winter.

Sufficient quantity (t/DM)

High quality (MJ/kgDM)

Target dry matter (%)

The first objective of the Biotal Opticut system is to plan to meet total requirements, producing enough DM from your combination of crops. Your total dry matter requirement is kgDM per cow per day x days in feeding period. Work this out and you can then plan production.
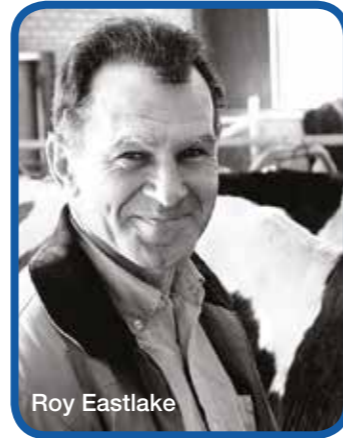
Where are you today?

First cut is the first stage in hitting the total so make sure you know how much you have made. Measure the amount in the clamp 10 days after it is made and assess the tonnes of dry matter based on the dry matter of grass going into the clamp. Confirm this by sending a core sample for analysis, which will also indicate the quality of feed you produced and you can plan accordingly.

What do you need to make? What are your options?

Filling the forage gap

Work out how much first cut you have per cow in kgDM/day. The difference between your requirement and this figure is what you still need to produce. Then consider options to help you take control with forage

Once you know what you need to make you can then plan to make it.

Roy Eastlake

Some likely 2018 scenarios for a typical farm

Target forage - 200 cows for 200 days and feeding 13kgDM/day of average 11.0MJ/kgDM = 520tDM required
First cut plan - 120 acres @6t fresh/acre and 32%DM at 11MJ = 230tDM

Scenarios and options	1 Cut on time for Opticut and in good conditions	2 Cut two weeks late at typical conventional cutting date, higher yield but lower quality	3 Cut two weeks later than normal due to weather, crop development and late fertiliser, poorer quality
Yield	6t/acre at 32% DM – 230tDM @11.5ME	8t/acre at 30%DM – 288tDM @10.5ME	6t/acre at 27%DM – 194tDM @10.5ME
Yield compared to target of 230t	100%	125%	85%
Energy compared to target of 230t @11MJ	105%	137%	77%
Energy density (MJ/kgDM)	105%	91%	91%
Challenges	Continue to hit quality and quantity targets and produce more high quality forage	Producing forage to balance low energy density in first cut	Filling both energy and dry matter shortfalls. Quality is the key issue
Options	Follow existing plan Increase second cut acreage if possible and cut on 28 day interval to increase yield and quality Continue to focus on quality from all forages	Second cut grass likely to be stemmier so cut on 28 day interval to preserve quality Make more second cut if possible Look to increase total cuts and maintain quality by working on 28 day cutting cycle	Increase second cut acreage and graze tighter Cut at 28 days and plan more cuts on same frequency Consider options for fermented wholecrop to provide additional forage

Success criteria for a quality second cut

- Determine cutting date - target 28 day interval to maximise cuts per season.
- Measure your grass wedge, calculate the grazing requirement and cut the rest. Can you graze tighter for a short period while grass is still at peak growth to maximise second cut?
- Calculate how much N can be applied at 2 units/day and still allow cutting on target date. Remember to include nitrogen from slurry.
- Tell your contractor your plans.

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