



Consider your forage options now

Biotalk Technical Support Manager Roy Eastlake believes detailed planning and some different thinking will be needed to ensure sufficient forage is produced this year.

Following the challenging growing season in 2018, many dairy and beef farmers have been faced with having to balance and stretch forage stocks to get through the winter. Thoughts must now turn to ensuring the 2019 season delivers the forage necessary to rebuild stocks.

It is important to plan carefully as you need to be producing enough forage this year to allow high daily intakes next winter, and also produce the forage needed to allow buffer feeding through to until the end of July 2020. With margins likely to be squeezed, driving forage intakes will be particularly important.

I admit this will be a serious challenge for some producers, but on every farm I visit there are real opportunities to boost forage production.

The first task must be to plan how much forage you need to produce. Think in dry matter terms and calculate the total tonnes of dry matter needed to feed all the stock on the farm.

Once you have a target, you can calculate how much forage you will produce following your normal approach and assuming average yields. Comparing this to the target will identify any forage shortfall.

Now you can look at how to fill the gap. I believe there are broadly three ways farmers can look at producing extra forage this year, and all farms should be able to use a combination of these to boost forage output but not at the risk of reducing quality.

Do what you currently do, but do it better

Are you maximising production of quality forage from your existing system? When making grass silage, consider moving to an Opticut system and making silage in a day to reduce risk and field losses. Last year was a difficult year for Opticut but that is no reason to stop using the system, as the benefits are proven and significant.

If you grow maize, select a variety which will produce the highest yield of high quality feed. Go for early varieties which will be harvested sooner. For farmers growing wholecrop, look at cutting dates and see if you could cut sooner to improve quality and quantity.

Do something different

If your current system won't produce enough, what can you do to produce more? Last year many farmers took cereals as wholecrop and this is a great way to give stocks a boost. Growing maize on contract with a neighbouring farmer is another way to increase stocks and has big benefits for both parties.

Undersowing maize with grass and planning to grow fodder crops after cereals are ways to produce extra forage on your own farm

Consider all the alternatives as there is bound to be one to suit.

Feed more of what you grow

We still waste a huge amount of silage in this country. We make it, store it and then throw as much as 15% away. Reducing waste in the clamp and at feed out to increase utilisation will, in many cases, be one of the easiest ways to increase available forage but you need to plan to do this now so changes can be made over the summer.

Investing time in planning forage requirements and thinking broadly about how to increase production will be one of the best investments you can make.



Roy Eastlake



UK produced and quality assured

Every time you open a sachet of a Biotal crop and condition specific inoculant you can be confident that it will deliver improved fermentation and superior clamp stability, thanks to the rigorous quality assurance systems operated at our Malvern plant.

When you apply an inoculant you are trusting that it contains a high population of viable bacteria to rapidly establish high numbers and overwhelm the less beneficial and naturally occurring bacteria. As Quality Assurance Manager Alison Johnson explains, this is the focus of our production approach.

“Our focus is on producing a consistent product of guaranteed quality,” she explains. ***“Everything we use in the production of our inoculants is assessed to rigorous standards.***

The bacteria themselves are produced by Lallemand Animal Nutrition and are tested thoroughly against specifications before being released for use in products.”

Alison explains that all Biotal inoculants are produced to a higher specification than is quoted on the label. They are formulated so that the bacteria populations at the end of the shelf life will still meet the label specification to ensure they remain effective.

“But what really matters is bacterial viability,” Alison continues. ***“You want the bacteria in the pack to have the ability to grow quickly. It is not only the start number that matters but their ability to grow. Every batch produced is tested to ensure the bacteria counts and viability are where they need to be.***

“This means farmers can be assured that Biotal inoculants will deliver in the clamp, helping ensure the required fermentation.”

In addition to assured quality, Biotal inoculants are manufactured exclusively in the UK meaning farmers can be certain that supply of inoculants will not be compromised by any disruption in imports from continental Europe which may result from Brexit.



Alison Johnson

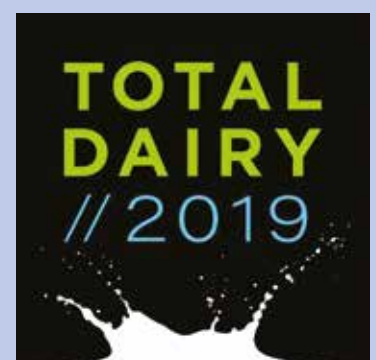


TOTAL DAIRY 2019

Lallemand Animal Nutrition are pleased to be one of the platinum sponsors of the Total Dairy Seminar 2019 being held at The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon on 19-20 June.

Total Dairy is the biggest gathering of global dairy specialists held in the UK and is the perfect place to get up to date with the latest research and ideas for efficient, sustainable dairy production.

For more details go to www.totaldairy.com



Making full use of quality forage



Paul Greening and Biotal's Mike Burns

Attention to detail when producing and utilising forage is a key component in the successful management of one Cumbrian dairy herd.

Paul Greening runs a herd of 570 all year round calving cows averaging 10,000 litres at 4.0% fat and 3.3% protein. The business is run in partnership with his father Philip. Although managed as a single business the herd is split across two units, with Paul managing the herd at Waverbank, and Phil in charge of the Mockerkin herd.

All cows calve at the home farm at Waverbank and they stay here until they are confirmed in calf, are producing less than 30 litres and are in suitable condition. At this point they move 15 miles to the unit at Mockerkin.

At Waverbank cows are housed in two groups, fresh cows up to 30 days in milk and a main milking group. Cows are housed all year, TMR fed and topped up with concentrate supplied through out of parlour feeders and are milked three times a day.

Condition score

At Mockerkin, where management is focussed on managing condition score, cows will graze in the summer while in the winter they are on self-feed silage. They are milked twice a day.

"We move more cows down to Mockerkin in the summer to take the pressure off at Waverbank and to make full use of the grazing there," Paul explains. *"A major objective here is managing condition score ahead of drying off so parlour feeding is based on condition rather than yield."*

Paul has to manage the balance between quantity and quality when making forages. He targets cutting 260 acres of first and second cut at Waverbank with 150 acres of third cut. First cut is taken in early May with second cut six weeks later. He regularly reseeds his cutting block with slightly later heading cutting leys which suits the farm.

The leys at Mockerkin are principally permanent pasture and he makes 150 acres of first and second cut here. He works closely with his contractor Colin Smith on all aspects of silage making, including decisions on the inoculant to use.

"All grass silage is treated with either Supersile or Axcool, depending on dry matter," Biotal Regional Business Manager Mike Burns explains. *"Paul has both products on farm and they choose the best inoculant to use each day based on the dry matter of the grass. They have even swapped during the day to apply the most appropriate inoculant for the crop."*

"Paul also makes spring wheat fermented wholecrop which comes in with the third cut. Using spring wheat avoids the crop getting too mature, which can be a problem with winter wheat. Cutting at 35-45% DM means the crop is more digestible and less lignified so has a higher feed value. It is ensiled with Wholecrop Gold."

Having made good quality forages, Paul believes it is essential to maximise the value of it. Silage is removed from the clamp with a shear grab and faces are kept clean and tight.



Efficient digestion

To improve rumen efficiency and fibre digestion he includes Biotal SC Digestaid in the Waverbank TMR, feeding at 25g/day. Digestaid contains the rumen specific live yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* CNCM 1-1077 which can help improve degradability and digestibility of fibre.

"There is no point feeding a diet if it goes straight through the cow," Paul comments.

"When we feed digestaid we see more consistent dung with less fibre in it so we are happy the rumen is functioning well."

"Even in a year when forage has been tight we have kept cows milking well. The cows at Waverbank are still averaging 34 litres on a mix of second and third cut silage."



Significant increase in milk from forage in just two years

Focusing on increasing forage quality and intakes has enabled Andrew Eastabrook to achieve a massive increase in production from forage and a significant reduction in purchased feed.

When he took over as farm manager at Home Farm, part of Hartpury University & Hartpury College, the 250 strong herd was all year round calving, averaging 9500 litres on an intensive feeding system. Now just two years later, the herd is moving rapidly to autumn calving with two thirds now calving in the target block. Yield per cow has stabilised but milk from forage has risen to 3300 litres and concentrate use has fallen by one tonne per cow. Now Andrew is targeting 280 cows and 4000 litres from forage within 12 months.

Key to the improvement in performance is the production of better quality forage and Andrew is using lessons learned in 2018 to help manage risk in 2019.

“Provided forage is good quality, cows will eat plenty of it and perform well,” he emphasises. *“We were feeding 8kgDM from forage but the latest diet produced by Roy Eastlake includes 14.9kgDM from forage and the cows are actually eating over 16.5kg forage dry matter per day.*

“We have worked out we need just under 1000 tonnes of forage dry matter to meet our requirements with a minimum 30% of this from maize so this is what we plan to achieve.”

Most maize is grown on contract and the acreage can vary year to year depending on the grower's rotation. If the contract acreage is less than usual he will either grow more maize at home or grow wholecrop, usually triticale.

“Wholecrop has done well in the past and is an excellent insurance crop. We have a small arable acreage and can divert cereals into wholecrop if required.”

Following discussion with Roy Eastlake, Andrew has moved to an Opticut system making silage in a day to reduce variability, by reducing the length of wilt and also minimising the impact of weather. First cut is taken in early May and he targets a 28 day cutting interval.

“We are a very dry farm but last year managed three cuts at a 29-32 day interval. First cut was 80ha with the same area taken for second cut. Quality was excellent because we were taking young grass. First cut was 12MJME with second at 11.5MJ.

“Although it was a difficult year for Opticut grass with the hot, dry weather reducing the rate of regrowth I have no doubt it allowed us to achieve a higher production than if we had cut later.”

To minimise waste all forages are treated with Biotol crop and condition specific inoculants. Clamps are sealed with Silostop and black plastic before being weighted with tyres and gravel bags. Silage is removed using a shear grab.

“Waste levels are still too high so reducing these is a priority for this year and part of the way we will manage risk.

“We will always give cows priority and if needs be will sell beef cattle as stores to preserve forage stocks. We will consider taking wholecrop to bolster stocks but have decided fodder crops for youngstock are not well suited to our system. We are already a mixed enterprise farm with several crops to focus on and we have generally heavy soils.

“By planning carefully, managing risk and paying real attention to detail I am hopeful we will hit our 4000 litres from forage target,” Andrew concludes.



Andrew Eastabrook



Lallemand Animal Nutrition UK Limited, Spring Lane North, Malvern link, Worcestershire. WR14 1BU

Tel: 01684 891055 • @Biotaluk

LALLEMAND ANIMAL NUTRITION

www.biotal.co.uk

LALLEMAND