

With variable forage stocks in many parts of the country, silages will need careful management this winter to maximise their contribution in diets. Dairy Farmer reports.

Plan now for forage use

David Wilde, national ruminant technical manager with Massey Harpers Feeds, says the sooner farmers plan how to use forages this winter, the better the chances of having a more successful season.

He says: "It is likely that many farms will be facing some big questions around forage stocks and may need to adjust plans or do things differently this winter."

"The starting point is to be realistic about the quantities you have, as this will determine a great deal about how winter will shape up."

He advises measuring the size of the clamps. The length, breadth of face and average height together will give the volume. Multiply this by the density of the silage to determine the total quantity.

Mr Wilde says: "This will be the best guide and is not an exact science. The actual density will be affected by a range of factors, including packing rate, chop length, dry matter [DM] of the incoming crop, use of additives and crop variety. An analysis will give the DM which will be a good indicator of density."

"Knowing the quantities in stock and anticipated from maize and subsequent cuts, you can calculate how much forage DM is available for the herd."

"If you do not have enough to feed at the usual rate, it might

It is important to understand the rate silage is being used, says David Wilde.



be prudent to prioritise grass silage for milking cows, using hay for the dry cows and straw for the youngstock, supplemented with appropriate concentrates."

Mr Wilde stresses the importance of understanding the rate silage is being used at to avoid difficult decisions towards the end of the season. He advises weighing shear grab loads to get a picture of how much is being used.

He says: "For example, a herd of 180 cows being fed 12kg forage

DM/day would require 2.2 tonnes DM/day. If fed with a shear grab with a 1cu.m capacity, this would be achieved with 11 grabs of a 30% DM forage or 10 grabs if the forage was 40% DM."

"If you feed out based on the number of grabs rather than weight per grab, then you could be getting through the silage quicker or underfeeding the cows, both of which will be costly. Also check your feeder weigh cells are weighing correctly at least monthly to ensure it is working accurately."

Mr Wilde says it will be vital to analyse silages frequently this season and advises monthly analysis as a minimum, but more often if changes are seen in the clamp using an Forage Analysis Assurance Group member laboratory to ensure testing is as accurate a result as possible.

He adds protein balancing is also crucial to keep cows milking. It will be essential to ensuring

sufficient useable protein is in the diet but that the diet does not contain too much soluble protein.

"The former drives milk production, the latter in excessive amounts will compromise fertility and lower efficiency, as well as being bad for the environment. Choose supplements carefully which precisely balance your forages."

Protein blends

"For example, two 24% protein blends could perform totally differently with contrasting balances of protein. The blend with a suitable balance might supplement forages well and let cows perform to potential, while the other might deliver disappointing results."

"Look beyond crude protein and challenge your nutritionist to ensure the diet is balanced for fibre, starches, sugars and protein sources to help get the most from forages this winter."

Estimated silage densities

DM (%)	Clamp height (metres)			
	2	2.5	3	4
20	156	168	178	190
25	173	183	194	208
30	186	198	207	222
35	200	210	219	235
40-plus	208	220	228	244

Note: Estimated silage densities (kg dry matter/cu.m) for different dry matter contents and clamp heights. Source: AHDB