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AUTUMN LIVESTOCK



David Wilde of Massey Feeds

It's vital to ration cows precisely to maximise margins over feed costs

AS A better picture of this winter's silages and the prospects for winter feeding develops, it is clear cows will need careful supplementary feeding to maintain margins in the face of the milk price squeeze, says David Wilde, national ruminant technical manager at Massey Harpers Feeds.

"Overall first cut grass silages on average look to be good crop," says David.

"Dry matter is averaging around 30 per cent with 14 per cent crude protein and 11MJ/kgDM of ME.

"Average crops are well fermented but both NDF and lignin levels are high, reflecting a higher proportion of overwintered grass. The effect of this is to slow down how quickly some silages will ferment in the rumen."

Variability between crops is high.

Some farmers were able to cut on time and have made high-quality feeds. However, others had to play cat and mouse with the rain, which has affected quality.

He said there is a similar picture with second cuts, although generally they are drier.

Looking at other crops, he

says that the unseasonably wet July and early August means grass growth has been considerably higher than the five-year average, so prospects for third and subsequent cuts are good, while late season grazing could reduce pressure on stocks.

On the downside, the cooler, less sunny weather may impact on maize crops, reducing the rate of cob development and starch deposition and affect how these crops feed out.

With lower milk prices anticipated it is going to be vital to make the most of forages to ensure they are supplemented in a cost-effective way.

Because the silage in any clamp will be variable, David recommends having all forages analysed at least monthly to make sure you know the quality of silages being fed and can tailor the diet as required.

"Failing to analyse regularly will potentially affect performance and costs per litre, so put dates in your diary now and make sure samples are taken," he says.

Armed with an accurate analysis, farmers can then ensure they are choosing a compound or blend

formulated to get the most from their forages.

All Massey dairy feeds are available in a range of metabolisable protein contents to balance other feeds in the diet. Many include the unique FiMLAC mineral pack to ensure cows are getting all the minerals they need in the most bioavailable form.

"If your analysis shows you have got some highly digestible, low fibre silage then you can be sure this will ferment quickly, and you will benefit from a higher digestible fibre compound," says David.

"However, if the analysis shows high NDF and lignin in the silage and lower digestibility then the rumen will benefit from more rapidly fermentable carbohydrates with a variety of starch sources in the compound.

"This winter it is going to be vital to ration cows precisely and supplement forages accurately to maximise margins over feed costs at lower milk prices.

"The best way to achieve this will be to make sure the purchased feeds you use are high quality and deliver what your cows need," ends David.