FEEDING FOCUS

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Silage quality challenge for 2017

Further analysis of this season's first, second and subsequent cuts is now available and a picture reflecting the effects of a very varied season is emerging.

2017 early first cut analysis is classed as a category three silage. This means that it has a high milk yield potential and digestible protein content compared to 2016. To give an example, 10 kgs silage DM could yield one litre of milk more than in 2016. Class three silage offers higher milk yield potential but can require careful balancing to optimise rumen health.

ForFarmers analysis of subsequent silage cuts has shown a reduction in quality, with lower energy, protein remaining good but high fibre content, resulting in a lower milk yield potential and it being more of a challenge to feed.

The two factors to focus on with this years' silage will be milk yield potential and dry matter intake. Silage with lower MELK and higher fibre will pose a greater challenge.

Managing this change in quality, especially when moving between clamps or different cuts, will be important as farmers drive milk yields forward this autumn and winter. Later cuts are likely to have a negative impact on forage dry matter intake.

2017 grass silage first and second cut summary

	First cut	Second cut
Dry Matter (%)	31.3	33.2
MELK (/kg)	976	938
TDP (g/kg DM)	57	52
RFC (g/kg DM)	177	152
ME (MJ/kg DM)	10.8	10.4
Protein (% DM)	14.4	14.7
Sugar (% DM)	6.9	4.8
NDF (% DM)	48.4	50.8
NDFd (% DM)	70.9	67.1
Lactic acid (% DM)	7.4	7.1

What does this mean?

Milk yield potential
First cut v second cut 2017
- a reduction in energy (MELK, RFC)
- -0.8 litre potential drop

Dry Matter Intake
First cut v second cut 2017
- increased fibre, reduced forage DMI by 0.5 -1kg
- -2.0 litres potential drop

Quantity and quality

The quantity of silage may also be an issue for some producers this winter. It is important to calculate how much silage you have and if it is enough to get you through key feeding periods. If not, explore alternatives to plug the gap.

Bulk Feeds

Alternative bulk feeds could provide an opportunity to improve the quality of the rations, helps intakes and increase the milk yield potential of poorer quality silage. Maize crop potential looks favourable in many areas of the country, with good bulk and cob development. Ultimately, maize silage quality will be determined by time of harvest and weather conditions. If there are any concerns about volume, quality and availability then again alternative bulk feeds could be a stopgap option. Both brewers grains and SelcoPlus offer key nutrients to improve ration nutrient quality and support any volume shortfalls.

	Dry Matter (%)	Protein (%DM)	Starch (%DM)	NDF (% DM)
Brewers grains	24	25	n/a	60
SelcoPlus	46	19	16	19.5

Feed2Milk (F2M) analysis terminology helps provide information about a herd's potential performance by giving a much better understanding of how each individual farm's forage will perform, allowing you the most effective nutritional solutions on farm. Feed2Milk expresses these predictions through a new set of figures including:

MELK - More Energy for the Lactating Cow - True energy available to the cow for milk production.

TDP - True Digestible Protein - The combination of microbial protein and protein that isn't degraded in the rumen. This is used by the cow for maintenance and production.

RFC - Rapidly Fermentable Carbohydrate - Starch, sugar, fibre, fermented in the rumen for less than two hours, plus silage fermentation products (lactic acid).

Individual silage analysis will be more important than ever this year. ForFarmers Silage Manager+ uses dry NIR technology to predict what impact each nutrient will have on rumen health as well as its yield potential.

For more information and to determine how to get the most from your silage contact your ForFarmers account manager or call 0845 722 5583