

forage watch

with Micron Bio-Systems

While we can pray for good weather this year, there is no guarantee we will get it. However, there are many areas where some early planning can help ensure both the quality and quantity of any crop are as good as they can be.

“First decide how many acres you need for silage to provide enough forage to see you through the next winter,” says New Breed UK’s Richard Rolfe. “A dairy cow will consume about 10.5 tonnes of silage based on 12kg dry matter intake over a 210-day winter with a silage dry matter of 25%. This will increase to about 15 tonnes per cow if you are planning to buffer feed,” he adds.

“Aim to maximise first cut acreage,” says Graham Ragg of Mole Valley Farmers. “Even a modest increase of 10 acres of additional first

In the first in this sponsored series helping you get the most out of your conserved feeds, we look at early season planning with New Breed UK’s **Richard Rolfe** and Mole Valley Farmers’ **Graham Ragg**.

Are you ready for the coming silage season?



Milk production depends on getting silage making right.

cut can make a considerable difference to silage output. If this 10 acres is cut twice more through the season it can supply 20t/acre or 200t of extra silage. It can often pay to keep cows on a tighter stocking rate at turnout to allow for this extra 10 acres of silage.”

The table below shows the range of dry matter intakes for a dairy herd. Working backwards you can determine the silage acreage needed. A cow consuming 12kg dry matter per day translates into 48kg fresh silage per day at 25%DM.

Range of dry matter intakes

	Dry Matter Intake (kg/head/day) range
Milking cows	10-15
Dry cows	8-10
Heifers (1-2 years)	7-10
Heifers (0-1 year)	2-6

ary prior to first cut. Sheep grazing after this date will reduce yield, and slurry applications later than the end of January will result in harmful bacteria on the grass which can give rise to the wrong kind of fermentation in the clamp,” says Mr Ragg.

“Apply first cut fertiliser as soon as conditions allow,” advises Mr Rolfe.

“First cut silages tend to produce more milk than second cuts even when they have the same analysis, and make sure any remainder is applied at least six weeks prior to cutting,” he says.

“Nitrogen levels for the first cut need to be around 80 to 100 units/acre (100 to 125kg/ha) to maximise first cut yield, which is usually the highest yielding and

Over a 210-day winter, this equates to around 10 tonnes of fresh silage or around 0.5ha per cow in milk (assuming 18t/ha fresh silage).

Silage fields

Another thing worth doing is to walk your silage fields. Molehills, stones and unevenness need to be addressed. “Also assess your swards for composition of perennial ryegrass so a reseeding or repair strategy can be formulated,” suggests Mr Ragg.

“If lower than 50% perennial ryegrass, a complete reseed should be considered. And broad leaved weeds may need chemical control if over 5% of the sward.

“Do not graze silage ground with sheep or apply slurry after the end of Janu-



Graham Ragg

best quality,” adds Mr Ragg.

If you are going to use a contractor, contact him early so he is aware of your likely requirements. Then check the clamp for repairs and fill gateways with hardcore.

Make sure you have

enough silage sheets to fully overlap the side walls and top of the pit, and if possible use of vacuum film to cover the grass.

Order all consumables well ahead. “Use a well proven additive to maximise silage performance and reduce dry matter loses,” advises Mr Ragg.

Even in perfect harvesting conditions, the use of a multi-component inoculant containing lactic acid producing bacteria and enzymes, such as the Advance range from Micron Bio-Systems, can lead to significant improvements in silage quality.

Lactic acid producing bacteria ensure a rapid and efficient fermentation – the faster the fermentation is completed, the more nutrients will be retained. Look for product that contains a combination of lactic acid producing bacteria to dominate the full fermentation across the pH range.

Enzyme benefits

The inclusion of enzymes has two potential benefits. Firstly, they break down complex carbohydrates such as starch and cellulose into sugars which help promote more lactic acid and so aid the fermenta-



tion process – particularly useful when sugars are limited as will be the case where crops are harvested in wet conditions.

Secondly, enzymes have been shown to have a positive effect on digestibility, particularly after storage of between 30 to 60 days.

“Finally, aim to cut a week earlier. By mentally preparing for an early cut it allows you more flexibility as the season progresses. After all, it is the quality and quantity of the silage that underpins your dairy performance,” says Mr Rolfe.



Richard Rolfe

ENDURANCE E-3120 WIND TURBINE OPEN DAY

We are holding Open Days

28th February – Ceredigion, Wales

22nd March – Rhoshill, Wales

12th April – Holsworthy, Devon

26th April – Skeffington, Leicestershire

16th May – Earlston, Borders

20th May – Bathgate, Scotland

Delegates will be given the opportunity to visit the turbine, understand planning requirements, consider flexible financing options and speak with the farmer who owns the turbine.

Numbers are limited so please contact Jenn to book your place.

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