

forage watch

with Micron Bio-Systems

A strong outlook for the start of the silage season means all farmers should be looking to maximise first cut potential to ensure good forage stocks for the year ahead.

The mild winter and warm spring means most should be in for a bumper first cut, with grass growth about two weeks ahead of the same time last year, says New Breed UK's Richard Rolfe.

"We should get a more normal growth pattern of grass this year versus last year's cold spring. That should allow good grass quantities and quality."

Mr Rolfe says planning is



“Ideally you want a dry matter of 28-33% Richard Rolfe

As we launch the 2014 Forage Watch series, New Breed UK's Richard Rolfe and Mole Valley Farmers' Graham Ragg discuss options for farmers for the forthcoming season.

Look to maximise first cut potential



Farmers should get grass sampled for N and sugar levels before cutting.

crucial to success, whether it be clamp preparation or discussing a game plan with contractors.

"If you use a contractor, be proactive and talk to them well in advance to ensure they understand your needs as a customer," he says. "Get your game plan together so you have control over it. Think about the time needed to allow for consolidation and the number of trailers you need. If trailers are coming in too quick, you won't get the consolidation and it will be detrimental to silage quality."

Clamps should also be thoroughly cleaned out and sheeted down in advance. It is also worth considering ordering a 'cling film' to use under the black plastic to

help create a seal and promote good fermentation.

Sampled

Mr Rolfe recommends getting fresh grass sampled two to three days prior to first cut to assess nitrogen and sugar levels. When fertiliser has not been absorbed by the grass and nitrogen levels are too high, it may be worth delaying first cut. This will prevent high ammonia levels in the clamp and silage palatability problems.

The warm, moist conditions also mean there may be a higher rate of fungal growth on grass. As a result, additives such as Advance could play more of a role in preventing spoilage at feed out. In general, additives can

help improve stability in the clamp and at feed out.

At harvest, wilt times should be monitored closely according to weather conditions. "Over the years we have started to see more high dry matter silages of 40-45%. These drier silages are harder to consolidate, more prone to heating up and likely to result in reduced intakes," he says.

"Ideally you want a dry matter of 28-33%. Be aware if it is very hot you will need to pick up earlier. Dry matter is something you can control, so consider how much grass you have cut in front of the forager to manage your wilt times."

When it comes to maize, Graham Ragg, of Mole Valley Farmers, believes it could be a good year for the crop if conditions remain fair.

"The last few years have been difficult so we haven't been able to see the full potential of the newer maize varieties. If it is a good year we should start to see the full benefits," he says.

The mild season also means growers are likely to see a good response to



**“If you can avoid using post-emergence sprays, that is good
Graham Ragg**

fertiliser applications. As maize is generally a hungry crop, ensure it receives ex-

actly the nutrients it requires, advises Mr Ragg. “A good crop of maize requires a total of 100 units/acre of nitrogen, 50 units/acre of phosphate and 200 units/acre of potash from the soil reserves, slurry/FYM or bagged fertiliser through the season.”

Fertiliser should be balanced with whatever muck you have on farm using the RB209 Fertiliser Manual.

Those thinking about drilling maize after the middle of May should focus on selecting early varieties and consider drilling at a lower seed rate, says Mr Ragg.

“An early variety

combined with a reduced seed rate of 40,000 seeds/acre will bring harvest date forward further than an early variety on its own. This lower seed rate means more light will be able to get down between the plants and there will be less competition for nutrients.”

Weed control

He recommends the use of pre-emergence weed control to reduce the need for post-emergence sprays.

“If you can avoid using post-emergence sprays, that is good as they can cause scorching of the plant which



can set the crop back about two weeks.

“If you spray a first year maize field after drilling you may be able to get away with not using a post-emergence spray at all.”

But a field where maize has been growing for the last two to four years may have increased weed build up. If you apply a pre-emergence spray it is likely you can use a lower rate post-emergence spray at the 2-4 leaf stage. This means the crop is set back as little as possible and reduces the scorching risk.

David R. Beech
BARN EQUIPMENT LTD

Dairy housing and production systems

Livestock Housing Equipment www.davidrbeech.com

Thinking of building a new barn or refurbishment ?
Expert advice including design/installation package available

- Different models of cubicles
- Latex meadow mattress
- Alanta waterbeds
- Youngstock cubicles
- Self-locking feed yokes
- Rotating cow brushes
- Heavy/duty beef gates
- PE Rope Scrapers
- Stainless Steel Water Troughs
- Waved neck bar

Telephone: 01477 544551 Mobile: 07711 259286 enquiries@davidrbeech.com

De Boer
Housing Systems Ltd

DUAL CHAMBER WATERBEDS;

- * Dual chamber waterbeds offer the best cow comfort of all mattress systems.
- * Cows pressure point are floating and therefore no abrasions on joints.
- * Prevents hock and knee injuries.
- * Improved blood circulation in joints.
- * Dry and clean surface area.
- * Liquids run off quicker than on ordinary mattresses.
- * Needs very little bedding.
- * Virtually no maintenance.
- * Lowest lifetime cost per bed.
- * 15-20 year life expectancy with 10 year limited manufacturers guarantee.

See us at Cornwall Show

ADVICE-DESIGN-SUPPLY-INSTALLATION

De Boer Housing Systems Ltd your partner in excellence.
Enquiries; call office telephone number 01208 816773
Rypke de Boer 07785 288257 or Sebastian Dudley 07773 060627

E-mail: info@deboerhousing.com Website: www.deboerhousing.com

forage watch

with Micron Bio-Systems

In the second of the 2014 Forage Watch series, we catch up with our farmers in Cumbria and Somerset. And expert Richard Rolfe gives advice on maximising first cut potential to ensure good forage stocks for the year ahead.



Jonathan Mason has been able to get his cows out day and night one week ahead of normal and maintain yields due to good grass growth

Good grass growth allows for early turnout

Good grass growth means Forage Watch farmer Jonathan Mason has been able to get cows out day and night one week ahead of normal and maintain yields.

The 220-cow autumn block calving herd is milking well, with cows averaging 21.5 litres a day – 2.5 litres up on the same time last year.

Mr Mason, who farms at Lawrence House, Kendal, says: "Considering where we are [in lactation], they are milking well. Generally they have been 2.5 litres up through the winter due to decent silage and the fact we are feeding 0.5kg extra meal."

Yields have maintained since cows were put out by day on April 4, despite changes to the ration. "Since they went out they have had no fodder beet or molasses and half as much meal mixed in with grass silage, but the yields have stayed the same," says Mr Mason.

On April 15, cows were being fed 3.5kg meal a day plus grass silage and were due to be put out to grass day and night that evening. Cows will gradually be weaned off buffer feed so they are only receiving grazed grass by the end of April.

"The grass looks like it will deliver so we will take what we can from grazing. There is loads

of grass and at the moment I think we may be a little ahead for first cut silage," adds Mr Mason.

Challenges

The fact the farm's grazing platform is split by a busy road creates management challenges for the Masons. The 19 paddocks of 1.2-1.4 hectares (3-3.5 acres) each around the farm are generally used for night and weekend grazing so cows do not have to cross the road to access the other 13ha (31 acres).

"We usually roll a lot of fields at this time [April], as we do not have a lot of acreage to spread slurry and we can make wheel

marks. Some fields have too much grass and are too wet, which means we have not been able to roll them," says Mr Mason.

This may increase the risk of soil being bought back to the clamp at silaging, so Mr Mason says he may choose to miss some areas at harvest.

All grazing ground gets an application of 25:5:5 once-a-month. This ground received its second application of 50 units of N/acre on April 3, with mowing ground receiving 55 units of N/acre at the same time. Mr Mason was also planning to reseed 6.9ha (17 acres) at the end of April.

Fodder beet bought-in to help fill forage gap

Bridgwater College's farm manager Steve Jones has been forced to buy-in 100 tonnes of fodder beet for the first time, to fill the forage gap created by the loss of nearly 32 hectares (80 acres) of wholecrop wheat.

He says: "We have never fed fodder beet before, but we are trying to stretch out our maize stock as we are not sure we are going to get wholecrop in July."

Mr Jones believes it may be possible to save six hectares (15 acres) of Rodway Farm's 32ha (79 acres) of wholecrop, which has been damaged by the wet autumn and winter. However, he has begun negotiations to buy 20ha (50 acres) of wholecrop wheat to help fill the gap.

Two tonnes per day of maize has been taken out of the total dairy cow diet. The low yielding group has had maize completely removed from the ration, along with a higher inclusion of haylage and the addition of fodder beet.

"We have calculated the ton-

nage we have based on worst case scenario, so this should take us through to harvest," says Mr Jones.

Maize under plastic

However, the hope is by growing maize under plastic, maize harvest date will be able to be bought forward to help with forage stocks.

"We are definitely doing some maize under plastic, but if we get a good seedbed we will do all of it under plastic," Mr Jones says.

"I have found if the seed bed is not perfect and the soil particles are too big, the plastic does not sit tight enough and you can lose the plastic. That means you do not get the benefit of the greenhouse effect."



Steve Jones says his first cut grass silage is fermenting well.

The plan is to definitely drill 40.5ha (100 acres) of maize. A decision will then be made on another 18.6ha (46 acres) of heavier ground. "We will experiment with the rotavator and if we get a good seedbed we will put it into maize and, if not, it will go into grass. Ideally I would like it all down to maize," says Mr Jones.

The 40.5ha (100 acres) of first cut grass silage taken at the end of March looks to be fermenting

well, although Mr Jones was not overly pleased with how it looked in the field.

"I am glad we cut, but having said that, I have made better silage. The grass was dead at the bottom and I was a little disappointed with the quality."

Rain during first cut meant 6.5ha (16 acres) was down in the field for four days. This was tedded twice to dry it out and appears to have clamped well.

Expert's view

By Richard Rolfe,
New Breed UK



A STRONG outlook for the start of the silage season means all dairy farmers should be looking to maximise first cut potential to ensure good forage stocks for the year ahead.

The mild winter and warm spring means most farmers should be in for a bumper first cut, with grass growth about two weeks ahead of the same time last year.

We should get a more normal growth pattern of grass this year versus last year's cold spring. That should allow good grass quantities and quality. However, planning is crucial to success, whether it be clamp preparation or discussing a game plan with contractors.

Be proactive

If you use a contractor, be proactive and talk to them well in advance to ensure they understand your needs as a customer, enhancing a good relationship. Get your game plan together so you have control over it. Think about the time needed to allow for consolidation and the number of trailers you need. If trailers are coming in too quick, you will not get the consolidation and it will be detrimental to silage quality.

Clamps should also be thoroughly cleaned out and sheeted down in advance. It is also worth considering ordering a 'cling film' to use under the black plastic to help create a seal and promote good fermentation.

I would recommend getting fresh grass sampled two to three days prior to first cut to assess nitrogen and sugar

levels. When fertiliser has not been absorbed by the grass and nitrogen levels are too high, it may be worth delaying first cut. This will prevent high ammonia levels in the clamp and silage palatability problems.

The year's warm, moist conditions also mean there may be a higher rate of fungal growth on grass. As a result, additives – such as the Advance range of silage inoculants from Micron Bio-Systems – can help play even more of a role in preventing spoilage at feed-out. In general, additives can help improve stability both in the clamp and at feed out.

Monitor

At harvest, wilt times should also be monitored closely according to weather conditions. Over the years we have started to see more high dry matter silages of 40-45 per cent. These drier silages are harder to consolidate, more prone to heating up and likely to result in reduced intakes.

Ideally, you want a dry matter of 28-33 per cent. Be aware if it is hot you will need to pick up earlier. Dry matter is something you can control, so consider how much grass you have cut in front of the forager to manage your wilt times.

Advance silage inoculants are formulated for individual crops. They contain two strains of lactic acid bacteria to drive the fermentation of ensiled crops from start to finish. An acetic acid forming bacteria inhibits yeast and mould growth when exposed to air to reduce waste and aid stability at feed-out. The addition of a proprietary enzyme package delivers digestibility and energy improvements, and the inclusion of a novel microbial stimulant pack ensures maximum activity of bacteria once rehydrated. For more information on Advance silage additives, visit the Micron Bio-Systems website: www.micronbio-systems.co.uk – or call 01278 421272.

FEEDBACK ONLINE

Read more and share your experiences at www.farmersguardian.com/foragewatch