



TURN lbs INTO £s THIS WINTER

BEEF AND SHEEP PRODUCERS WARNED OF LOW PROTEIN SILAGES

So far press articles on this year's silage quality have reported good results with both energy and protein levels being higher compared to last year.

However these reports, based on large numbers of samples have mainly been collected from dairy herds. In comparison SRUC's figures, from solely beef and sheep herds shows a different, worrying story. On average energy levels are average to good but protein levels are worryingly low with an average of just 10.8% protein in the dry matter.

To check whether this was just a Scottish problem we asked David Thornton of Rumenco for their beef/sheep figures from mainly English and Welsh farms. Their average figure was almost identical at just 11% CP in the dry matter.

"Hence the importance of getting silage analysed before the silage starts to be fed."

Well over 1 in 3 of the silages analysed by SRUC so far have a protein content below 10%. The concern is that feeding such silages without a protein supplement will fail to meet the protein requirement of the bugs in the animals' rumen. As a result the bugs will be less effective in breaking down the silage so it stays in the rumen for longer. This poorly digested feed means the animal has less room to eat more silage – reducing its protein intake further – resulting in more partially digested feed blocking the rumen – reducing



silage intakes further etc. Eventually the rumen becomes completely blocked with partially digested food and the animal effectively starves to death, generally known as rumen compaction. Interestingly because the rumen is "stuffed full" animals on a protein deficient diet showed no visual symptoms – always looking full. However a simple indicator is the consistency/dry matter of their dung. On a protein deficient diet the animals' dung will be firm, dry and look like solid, mini big bales.

In its early stages protein deficiency is very difficult to detect other than animals performing well below expectation. The only approach is to take blood samples. Hence the importance of getting silage analysed before the silage starts to be fed. If protein levels are low, seek professional advice over the best protein supplement and the levels required for different classes of stock.

Although protein supplements are much more expensive than straight cereals it is important to remember any reduction in silage intake will all be reflected in reduced performance so that meeting the animals' protein requirements will be extremely cost effective.

Dr Basil Lowman,
SAC Consulting Beef Specialist.

LOW DRY MATTER GRASS HITS CATTLE GROWTH RATES

Grazing conditions have been really favourable in many parts of the country because of the recent spell of warm weather, but cattle growth rates are being compromised because livestock are struggling to ingest enough forage dry matter from lush pasture

"Grass is the cheapest feed on the farm at around 1p/kg DM, so it's well worth making the most of it. But this year many grazing pastures are so low in dry matter that growing cattle are simply not getting enough nutrition from the forage on offer, reports David Thornton, Rumenco Technical Manager.

Many cattle producers will now be thinking about supplementary feeding, but concentrates will not be the best option for a number of reasons, he argues.

"Even small amounts of concentrates can cause substitution of what grass DM is available, simply because the rumen bugs needed to ferment either pasture fibre or starch from concentrates are quite different. The rumen can go out of synchrony and the result is expensive and disappointing performance.

Rumenco says lick block enquiries are running at record levels for the time of the year, but this is not surprising. The product of choice under these conditions is **MAXX** Cattle Booster, which is also available with XPC yeast culture, for pushing the cattle on faster. **MAXX** provides excellent control of consumption

under these low DM conditions, according to David Thornton.

"A lot of trial work has been done to look at feeding licks to cattle with grass over the grazing period. The benefits are now well documented and include an improved mean liveweight gain of 0.24kg per day over grazing alone."

"The licks also help suckler producers, in particular, make the most of the available grass and boost weaning weights, as well as offering easy-feed convenience."

Mr Thornton adds that lick consumption closely matches grass availability and this ensures less performance variation between cattle and this makes it easier for producers to sell even batches of weaned calves.



TURN CEREALS INTO BEEF

With feed wheat and barley continuing to hover around the £90/tonne mark, farmers reluctant to sell at any price are increasingly turning home-grown grain into beef.

According to David Thornton Technical Manager at Rumenco, current cereal and finished beef prices now mean that there is a profit to be made from rearing Holstein bulls.

“The most appropriate beef production system for the ‘late maturing’ Holstein is the cereal bull beef system. However up until recently – because cereals have been too expensive and finished beef prices not high enough to generate a profit – many black and white bull calves have met an untimely end. But changing market conditions mean prospects for Holstein bulls are looking up,” he says.

Finished beef prices are static or rising, he points out. “It’s no coincidence that prices for both finished beef and cull cows picked up with the combination of the resumption in the beef export trade and an undersupplied market for beef. Beef consumption in the UK is also continuing to rise, albeit slowly, mainly in mince and manufacturing grade beef for ready made meals. Supermarkets are short of this grade of beef, which the Holstein bull provides.”

David calculates that if ration costs can be kept to under £175/tonne, most producers should now be able to generate a margin to more than cover fixed costs – provided calves are reared to a high standard of management. “With cereals now under £100/tonne, producers feeding home-mixed rations should now be able to generate a very respectable margin and stop so many calves being shot.”

He also suggests proprietary urea-based protein balancers are a more than adequate replacement for natural proteins such as rapeseed – allowing additional margin opportunities after labour costs are factored in.

“In a study at Harper Adams urea protein replaced rapeseed meal in the ration using Rumenco’s urea-based protein supplement PROMOL BEEF. There was no effect on physical or financial performance. When you consider that PROMOL BEEF is also



molassed to aid palatability and reduce dust – as well as being fully balanced for minerals and vitamins so that you do not have to buy any additional supplements – urea-based supplements are an option well worth considering, particularly as effective ration mixing is that much easier. Using PROMOL BEEF simplifies the home mix and also allows a greater inclusion of cereals in the ration,” David Thornton says.

He says that urea-based supplements should be introduced gradually over a period of seven to 10 days and only fed to ruminating cattle over 12 weeks of age. To maximise margins, he stresses that feeding management “needs to be good”. Barley should be lightly rolled and fresh straw must be fed from racks to minimise problems with bloat and acidosis. Feed troughs should never be allowed to become empty or contain stale feed.”

At Harper the bulls were regularly weighed and selected for slaughter at fat class 3. High performing bulls are allowed to finish at heavy weights. They cut their losses with poorer performing bulls and kill them at lighter weights. It doesn’t make sense to keep heavy weight bulls when they are eating 10kg of feed and only growing at 1kg per day. The last batch of Holstein bulls on Promol Beef recorded a slaughter weight of 541kg at 13.5 months old, producing a carcass weighing some 280kg grading -O3, so meeting the recognised targets for a barley beef system.

START RIGHT. FINISH STRONG.

Aberdeenshire farm shows how to finish continental crosses heavier and earlier by using XP_{LS} a fermentation feed material.

Finishing cattle rations are often characterised by their high energy cereal based feeds. These high cereal diets promote fast weight gain but can lead to increased rumen acidity which is associated with a reduction in the energy utilisation of the diet along with challenges to animal health. Furthermore, the rumen microbial population needs to change from supporting a growing diet to supporting a large population of starch digesting bacteria with the finishing diet. Helping the animal to adapt quickly to this change will improve the efficiency of the animal and decrease the risk of metabolic issues.

XP_{LS} is an all-natural fermentation based feed material used in all types of ruminant diets. It is not a single compound, but rather a fermentation product composed of numerous beneficial metabolites together with beta glucans and mannans to support animal health and performance. The unique metabolites of XP_{LS} support rumen digestive health by balancing rumen microbiota and optimising the rumen environment. Adding XP_{LS} to the finishing diet ensures cattle finish strong with optimal rumen performance. XP_{LS} aids finishing cattle by supporting consistent feed intake, maximum ration digestibility, daily gain and feed conversion.

A recent finishing study in Aberdeenshire looked at the effect XP_{LS} had on the physical and financial performance of intensively finished cattle. Fifty-two finishing cattle (mix of continental heifers, Limousin - black and red, Charolais and Simmental) approximately 16 months of age were randomly allocated to 4 pens. Two pens were offered 45 g/h/d of XP_{LS} top-dressed onto the freshly fed out ration each day. The experiment lasted 90 days, with all animals being weighed on days 0, 28, 58 and 90. Overall daily live weight gain (DLWG) was significantly greater for treated animals (1.56 kg/d v 1.4 kg/d; P<0.05). Furthermore, this difference was more pronounced during the first 28 days of the experiment (1.73 kg/d vs 1.45 kg/d; P<0.05), indicating that XP_{LS} helped animals adapt to the high starch, finishing diet. These improvements in DLWG equated to an improvement of 11.4% for the same feed and reduced cost/kg gain by £12.60/hd.



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