



MAKING THE MOST OF HIGH NDF GRASS SILAGE

It is fair to say 2021 was hardly a vintage first cut making season with challenging weather conditions resulting in a spread of harvesting dates. The challenge now is to help cows make the most of the silage and to develop cost-effective diets.

The table summarises the early and late cut samples we have analysed so far this season and it is clear that whenever first cut was made, it will need careful balancing, particularly to get the rumen firing.

Looking at the results, what stands out is that in general, first cuts are lower protein than usual but also higher NDF, reflecting how grass matured. They are also low in Rapidly Fermentable Carbohydrates which are the fuel for the rumen bacteria.

REGULAR ANALYSIS

As usual we are also seeing a tremendous variation in results so the first thing I would urge is to test your silage so you know exactly what is in your clamp so we can work on developing the best diet for you. Then make sure you analyse clamps regularly through the winter as we all know how the crop will vary through the clamp.

First cuts are going to need careful supplementation. The high NDF content will have the effect of slowing rumen throughput as the forage is harder to digest. This in turn will reduce dry matter intakes which are crucial for efficient milk production. What we need to do is support the rumen microbes to do their job, increasing the rate of digestion and in so doing maximise the yield of microbial protein, the most cost-effective protein for milk production.

The key to this is to provide rumen fermentable glycogenic energy sources, principally starch and sugars, to fire up the rumen, but without risking acidosis. At the same time we need to provide protein to balance the supply of energy. What we definitely do not want is to use fats to supply energy as this will just reduce the activity of the fibre-digesting bacteria we want to produce.

To achieve this we have produced a new range of compounds. Containing four different sources of starch, no added fat and four specially selected proteins, the Glycogenic Range has been designed for cows from 7,000-10,000 litres. It is available from 15-23% protein and at 13ME the range offers high natural energy.

To further improve the breakdown of NDF we have included the rumen specific live yeast Levucell SC. In the rumen, yeast stimulates fungi to attack the lignin, allowing bacteria to get to work digesting the cellulose and hemicellulose. Levucell SC also helps maintain an optimum rumen pH and reduces the risk of acidosis.

MOLASSES BLENDS

In addition to providing starch, molasses blends will supply an excellent source of sugars. In a diet we are looking for a 2:1 ratio of starch: sugars and ideally 6% sugars in the total diet.

Together with ED&F Man, we have developed Rumenboost to provide the additional sugars which will benefit many diets. At 60% protein and 51% sugars it is a rumen friendly balanced feed while also encouraging higher intakes.

This winter could present some challenges but by closely monitoring the silages in the clamp and developing a diet to optimise rumen function it will still be possible to make the most of first cuts, hopefully supported by some good quality later cuts and a good maize harvest.

For more information on our Glycogenic Range and Rumenboost, and to arrange to get your silage analysed, speak to your Feed Specialist.



		DM (%)	CP (%DM)	ME (MJ/kgDM)	NDF (%DM)	Fibre Index
Early first cuts	Max	43.8	17.1	12.0	53.7	215.8
	Average	33.9	14.1	11.4	43.8	175.7
	Min	23.6	10.9	10.3	36.3	144.7
Later first cuts	Max	52.0	18.2	12.1	58.0	236.5
	Average	37.7	12.5	11.2	49.2	198.1
	Min	21.9	8.8	10.4	34.2	136.2

Analysis of early and later 2021 first cuts

Farming thoughts

With daily activities getting a little more back to normal, I hope you all enjoyed our 16 videos online, creating our very own Virtual Harpers Royal Show. Thank you for all the positive comments, it means a lot.

The month of August see's us return to show action with Honiton, Exford and Okehampton shows. We are delighted to be finally getting out and about again and we will hopefully see some of you there. Shows are a major part of our industry, so it is great they are back.

We will be putting on our Autumn calver special offer of milk powders, calf feed and calf feeding troughs over August and September so make sure you don't miss out.

We have now tested over 200 first cut samples, all of which gives interesting readings. This year's first cuts are going to need careful balancing and we have the final piece of the jigsaw with our new initiative to help you make the most of your forages. Speak to your Feed Specialist for more information.

Our Planet range of feeds which was the first range in the UK to exclude soya and palm products is expanding all the time. Dairy, beef, sheep and now pig and poultry diets, which are sensibly sourced, and carbon considered are now available. Remember, we are the only compound feed manufacturer that have a range which is 100% soya and palm free.

We have further investments in the mill with the second BOA (double conditioner) being installed this month. This means we are using three presses for the next six weeks.

With lots of good quality grain now coming off the field, we will be reviewing our price lists in September for the 1st October 2021.

In September we will be carrying out some essential mill maintenance, which will mean our mill will be closed for four days.

More details about this will follow in due course.



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GRAINS AND STRAIGHTS UPDATE

At the time of writing the combines have just starting rolling. Generally, crops look in good condition and early suggestions of barley yields are good but quality is variable depending on soil type. It is estimated the UK will produce a 14-15 million tonne wheat crop, up from 9.65 million last year. Barley is predicted just over seven million tonnes, down from 8.1 million tonnes last year.

The gap between new crop wheat and barley is £15/t compared to £35-40/t last year, due to the availability of wheat. Even with big crops it is very difficult to see how prices can fall dramatically, with the possibility of two UK ethanol plants running from early 2022. Low global maize stock is also likely to keep prices high, as the wheat will ride on the back of maize prices which are currently at a £40/t premium, compared with parity last year.

UK sugar beet plantings are 5,000 hectares lower as farmers chose not to plant due to flea beetle risk. However, sugar beet remains attractive against soya hulls this winter, a role reversal of the summer!

Soya prices are between £354-385/t ex-docks.

To be honest, it is very difficult to see how soya prices can fall below the £350 mark, with lower ending stocks.

The USDA stocks and acreage report sent the market rocketing. Maize and soya plantings were up on the March 21st report but below market expectations, so soya went up to £25/t in just 24 hours.

The Canadian heat wave is also causing concern as we could see the rape crop reduced, which will put pressure on oil seed rape prices, so is difficult to see how rape can fall dramatically.

One of the main factors that will affect all commodities is freight rates and haulage costs. Shipments from the far east have gone up around £35 per tonne, and there is going to be massive pressure on haulage costs with fuel, parts and new vehicles increasing.

If you would like to talk through any of these points, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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SUSTAINABLE WESTCOUNTRY BEEF

We are continuing to develop protocols for a sustainable beef product that meets the requirements of Westcountry Beef PGI (Product of Geographical Identity) and has a low environmental and CO₂ footprint. Added to this, we need to rear and produce beef cattle that are feed efficient and of high eating quality. We have applied the key principles of genetics, health and nutrition to develop this programme.

GENETICS

For the most sustainable product, we have to use calves from the dairy herd which come into a rearing unit with a zero CO₂ balance sheet. Using sexed semen and genomics, dairy farmers can increase the proportion of the herd going to a beef sire. The beef genetics need to have calving ease, short gestation and exceptional growth. If a breed specific premium is available, this should be considered providing the genetics are up to standard.

HEALTH

Vaccinations, hygiene and ventilation are the key drivers to good performance in calf units. High quality stockmanship is essential for good disease control. The partnership between the dairy farmer and the beef rearer

should be built on shared information and constant attention to calf health through colostrum use, vaccinations and feedback.

NUTRITION

The Gold 'N' Rearing system has been pioneered by Harpers Feeds on their own development farm and we have results for the 2020/2021 rearing year from 100 Aberdeen Angus x Holstein calves purchased July 2020 with 98 calves reared to turnout in April 21.

The calves were fed up to five litres of Calfpride Gold milk replacer containing 150g/litre. During the first three months they were offered adlib Harpers Planet 18% Rearing Nuts which contain no soya or palm products.

The calves were weaned at 6-7 weeks when eating 0.75kg/day of the Rearing Nut.

At 3-4 months, calves gradually moved on to a 50/50 mix of Worthy Farmers 22% Molassed Beef Balancer Mix and Rolled Barley.

The rearing costs to turn out are good, with 1.01t total feed intake per calf over the rearing period at a feed cost of £176.58 per calf.

For more information about Sustainable Westcountry beef, please give me a call.



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PREPARING FOR TUPPING

There will be plenty going on as sheep farmers' thoughts turn to the next tupping season.

Preparing ewes for flushing

The all-important factor in pre-tupping nutrition is Body Condition Score. The optimum condition score at tupping is 3.5 for most lowland ewes, 3.0 for upland ewes and 2.5 for hill ewes. Realistically farms should aim to have 90% at the optimum score when the rams go in.

Sort ewes carefully post weaning and cull any ewes that you are not intending to breed from. Then group them by condition so they can be managed accordingly.

Thinner ewes should be given priority to the better grazing to gain condition with fat ewes held on barer fields to shift a bit of body fat, potentially taking them down half a condition score.

All ewes should be brought together for flushing three weeks before mating, ideally turned onto fresh aftermath pasture which will help the ewe ovulate to produce a larger number of eggs, and then holding to service when mated.

Any bought in-replacement ewes should be on farm at least a month before mating to allow time for biosecurity treatments, pre-tupping vaccinations for abortion, a quarantine period and for them to settle into their new environment and diet.

Does your farm have specific trace element deficiencies? Then make sure new sheep are supplemented like the resident flock so that deficiencies do not impact on fertility.

Don't forget the boys!

All rams should be inspected, and an MOT carried out 8-10 weeks before tupping checking the 5Ts.

These are:

Toes

Check locomotion, legs and feet

Teeth

Check for under or overshot jaw, gaps and molar abscesses

Testicles

Measure and check firmness (like a flexed bicep) with no lumps or bumps

Tone

Aim for body condition between 3.5-4.0 (spine well covered)

Treat - Check vaccinations are up to date (clostridia, pasteurella, parasites, lameness)

Speak to your Harpers Feed Specialist or contact Harpers Farm Supplies about the wide range of feeds and products we have to offer to ensure ewes and tups are ready to go, setting your flock up for a successful lambing period in 2022.



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PLAN NOW TO GET AUTUMN CALVES ON TRACK

It's August already and the dairy autumn blocks will soon start calving. With that comes the question- what are the calves going to be fed? Which then must beg the question - what targets to set for the stock?

Take five minutes to plan your targets

1. What age do you want them to calve?

2. What is the required DLWG between birth and calving?

3. What weight targets do you need to achieve by:

- Weaning
- 4 months
- 6 months
- Bulling
- Calving

Once these targets have been set, speak to your Feed Specialist about the best milk powder to hit the required growth rates in pre-weaned calves to get them off to the best possible start, along with our range of starter feeds. Don't forget- the team are fully trained in youngstock signals and are happy to help weigh and monitor your calves to keep them on track using Harpers growth chart.



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SPECIAL OFFER

During August and September, when you make your first order of a half pallet of any of our milk powders we will give you 5 small bags of any product in our calf feed range (Harpers Calf Starter Pellets, Calf Performer Nuts or Top Calf Mix) FREE*.

Place an order for a pallet of milk powder and receive a Wyedale Pellet feeder FREE*.

Select the milk replacer to suit your needs.

All our milk replacers contain only British milk products.



*Not in conjunction with any other offer. Offer is available throughout August and September and limited to one per account.

TIME TO TAKE HEAT STRESS SERIOUSLY

Heat stress is a major drain on performance for calves, rearing stock and dairy cows so it will pay to take steps to reduce the problem.

The major impact of heat stress is an increase in maintenance requirements as ruminants use energy to keep cool. At the same time, dry matter intakes are reduced, so it is easy to see why production suffers.

For example, consider a 600kg dairy cow producing 27 litres. At 12-16°C, her maintenance requirement will be 100MJ and her expected dry matter intake will be 21kg/day so she will easily be able to eat enough to hit her yield. But when it gets to 28°C, her DMI will drop to 12.5kg/day while maintenance will increase to 132MJ and you will see problems. In late July we saw herds losing six litres/day just due to heat stress.

There are some practical steps you can take now to help your stock cope with heat stress.

GRAZE AT NIGHT - Keeping cows in by day and grazing by night will protect cows from the highest temperatures and improve grazing intakes. In one case, this simple change increased yields by three litres per cow.



WATER IS KEY - Cows need plenty of clean, fresh water especially in hot conditions. Make sure you have plenty of trough space, that troughs refill quickly and are clean. Cows have a far more sensitive sense of smell than humans. Take a look at the water in the troughs, put your head down and smell it. If you wouldn't drink it, your cows definitely won't.

FEED MORE FIBRE - Cows generate a lot of heat as they ferment the diet. Fibre generates less heat than concentrates.

IMPROVE VENTILATION AND AIR FLOW Leaving doors open and removing every other Yorkshire board can greatly improve air flow to cool cows.

AVOID SLUG FEEDING OF

CONCENTRATES - Increasing the value of outside feeds can help reduce peaks in temperature.

Simple measures can make a big difference. Talk to our Feed Specialists, who are now all Cow Signals trained, about keeping your cows cooler.

REDUCE ENERGY SHORTFALLS WITH CRIMP

Following a challenging grass silage making season, crimped cereals could be a good way to balance lower quality silage which could be lacking in energy.

Crimp is the perfect option to help make up for an energy shortfall, as it easily reaches 12 MJ/kgDM at around 60%DM, providing energy in a rumen friendly form. It is a higher energy way to preserve cereals than wholecrop and has the added benefit that the straw is still available for bedding or feeding. The crop is harvested at 35-40%DM before being processed by a contractor with a specialist crimping unit which cracks the seed coat and exposes the starch.

As with all moist feeds, it is vital to ensure they are well clamped to reduce the risk of waste and using an appropriate inoculant will be essential.

Magniva Platinum Crimp is specifically designed for use in the preservation of moist grains. It's a biological option which ensures faster preservation, while helping prevent heating and spoilage at feedout.

By using an inoculant and following ensiling best practice it is straight-forward to produce a high energy feed which will help make up any shortfall and help ensure cost-effective rumen-friendly diets this winter.

For more information, speak to your Feed Specialist



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DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE FERTILITY WITH X-ZELIT

Getting cows back in calf is an important target for all dairy farmers which is why we have been using X-Zelit with great success.

X-Zelit works by binding calcium in the gut, which stimulates the cows' own system to mobilise body reserves which creates a perfect calcium balance at calving. This dramatically reduces clinical milk fever as well as reducing the unseen issues of sub-clinical milk fever. The result is healthier cows transitioning, settling into lactation better with superior fertility and more post calving energy.

A recent study at Cornell University on a high yielding dairy farm milking three times a day, averaging 11000 litres showed big improvements in fertility by feeding X-Zelit two weeks prior to calving.

The farm was having fertility issues with a pregnancy rate of 21%, with the main problem being sub-clinical milk fever.

They were seeing freshly calved cows not getting fired up, high levels of DAs, reduced feed intakes and lower fresh calved yields.

The farm had looked at a DCAB diet but with no success, finding it hard to manage. Instead, they started to feed X-Zelit two-three weeks before calving. After feeding it they saw a massive improvement with no DAs since.

The cows started eating as soon as they have calved. Rumination is good, the general health of the cows is better, and they are seeing more frequent and stronger heats. The pregnancy rate is now 26% and improving as they transition much better.

Speak to your Feed Specialist about using X-Zelit in your herd.



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