

Nutrition News

July 2018 • Issue 1



Understanding and managing shortfalls in grass and forage



The unprecedented dry weather we are experiencing is already impacting forage stocks on farm, with farmers having to supplement the shortfall in grass growth with forage – and in some cases this year's first cut silage is already being fed to cows, with little prospect of getting further cuts for many unless it rains.

The decline in grass growth and quality is impacting milk constituents, and the current milk price targets of butter fat 3.9% and milk protein 3.3% are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain in the current conditions. Yields are also dropping as fodder runs tight and heat stress impacts animal performance. What this all means is that now is the right time to review your fodder quantity and quality, in order to take some steps to help mitigate the effects of any future shortfall.

Have you got enough forage?

Knowing your herd's forage requirement, what you have available for them in the field, what forage stocks you have already and how quickly your grass is growing will help you plan your forage budget going forward.

Dry Matter Intake: It is important to be realistic when it comes to grazed grass intakes and to measure intakes accurately. This means we have to look at pre-grazing sward heights but also residuals to calculate approximate DMIs. If we know that a grass DMI of 14kg can support 16-17 litres, we know how much we have to supplement.

A plate meter (pictured right) will help you assess what dry matter (DM) you have available from grazing and how quickly the grass is growing, if at all. If grass supply will not meet herd demand you then have to consider what you can buffer with to maintain milk yield and constituents. When buffer feeding, look to feed in the cooler parts of the day in order to get maximum intakes.

In these very dry conditions it is more important than ever to ensure cows do not graze down too low. Tight grazing will reduce the energy store in the grass roots and, as there is no leaf to photosynthesise, it will slow down grass re-growth even further.

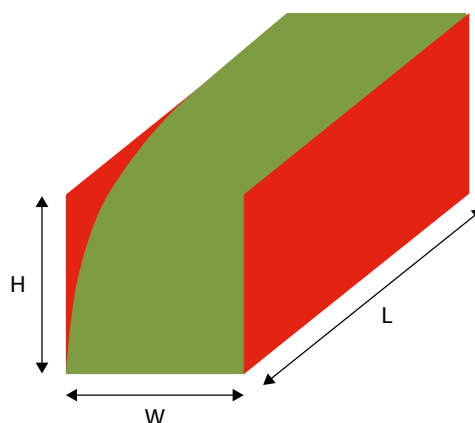


Assess your silage stocks

With first cut silage baled or in the clamp, and people thinking about second cut if the weather comes right, now is a good time to assess your silage stocks. If you produce bale silage, how many bales do you have and how do they analyse? If you produce clamp silage, measure the quantity and quality – this is particularly important to do accurately this year when we face real potential for shortages.

To calculate silage quantity, start by working out the total volume of your clamp :

$$\text{Volume} = \text{Length (L)} \times \text{Width (W)} \times \text{Height (H)}$$



Continues over.../



Then estimate how many tonnes of silage that your clamps are holding by using the following calculation along with the forage density table below:

Tonnes = volume x density (see table) ÷ 1,000

Crop	Density (Kg/m ³)
Grass silage (28% DM)	700
Maize silage (30% DM)	750
Fermented wcrop (45% DM)	500

Understand the quality

Of course, it is not just the quantity of silage that you have that is important, it is also critical to understand the nutritional quality, as that will impact on how you can feed it and help you plan the best and most cost-effective forage alternatives. Forage analysis can be arranged through Corby Rock Mill.

Managing a shortfall

If you have got a problem – and it's highly likely that due to the weather you will have a shortfall of both grazed grass and silage - what can you do?

- Feeding out silage or hay in the field or during milking is a good way to increase dry matter intakes when grass is scarce – providing you have good stocks of silage. Recent grass samples show DM of 24% on average. Know the DM of your silage to substitute accordingly.
- Consider alternatives such as wholecrop to bolster forage stocks, although it is getting late to harvest at the recommended DM of 40%.

- Switch to feeding straw for youngstock rather than silage, although this can be expensive at present.
- See if you can source forage maize.
- Consider alternative moist feeds.
- Consider selling excess stock, for example, cull cows now rather than waiting for planned culls later.
- Eek out forage stocks by feeding a forage extender concentrate.

With reports of many second cuts now being grazed and few reserves of silage it is worth looking at supplementing with a safe, cost-effective concentrate feed.

The Corby Rock Mill Forage Extender ration has been specially formulated to replace grass where shortages are causing difficulties. Approximately 1kg of the extender will replace 4-5kg of grazed grass and the Forage Extender Ration can be fed up to 5kg.

This highly palatable ration contains plenty of digestible fibre to maintain proper rumen function and encourage butterfat production. It is 11% crude protein, designed to balance the high protein that is still coming from grass.

With the dry weather looking set for the coming weeks it is critical to develop a feed budget to ensure that you have a plan for getting through the rest of the grazing season without impacting too much on winter forage stocks.

We're here to help, so for more information on feeding, budgeting and managing with grass deficits please contact your local Corby Rock sales advisor.