

Beef health scheme

To encourage a more proactive approach to beef health issues, we are now offering visits with no call out fee to beef farmers who schedule three or more pre-booked vet visits per year.

This could include fertility work, PDs, bull breeding examinations and disease monitoring. Contact Emily for more details.



Farm practice briefs:

- **Dairy show:** We have a stand at the rescheduled Dairy Show at the Royal Bath and West showground on January 30th. Please call in for a chat and a drink.
- **Sharp knives:** Remember we have a hoof knife sharpening service available for just £1 per knife to help cover costs – give them to your vet or post them to the practice.
- **Pig meetings:** There are pig meetings in association with BPEX on January 8th at Darts Farm on “Establishing the weaned pig” and on February 6th for “Medicine Training”. Contact the practice for details.
- **FHP:** There are still some funded places remaining on the farm health planning project for both beef and dairy herds. Initial consultations will only be running until Christmas so contact the practice for more details or to book in as soon as possible.
- **Fluke and worms:** levels have been very high this year. We have very competitive prices on Endofluke and Endospec 10. Please call Jayne for details.
- **What News?** if you have topics you would like to see covered in the newsletter or a burning issue to discuss please email emily@stdavids-vets.co.uk and we will do our best to include them.

Raw material update

STOP PRESS!! Rolled Maize grain now available in blends.

A very successful start to our blending business has seen record tonnage being delivered onto farm.

We can now offer the addition of maize grain into customer’s blends, for those who are looking for more bypass starch to increase milk quality and yield due to its high energy value. Those people with either no forage maize, or low starch content in this year’s maize crop, the addition would be an ideal compliment.

Soya: Still a bullish market with further increases on last month of £7–£8 per ton. A number of customers have booked for next year, concerned over possible shortages and currency potentially pushing prices upwards.

	November 07	December 07
Hipro Soya	£215	£223
Arg Soya	£210	£217
Sugar Beet	£165	£165
Soya Hulls	£146	£135
Rapeseed Meal	£149	£149
Wheat	£160	£170
Barley	£156	£166

Sugar beet: Prices relatively flat. Supplies for the rest of the winter getting tighter and major concerns growing for another shortage during the summer.

Rapeseed meal: You would normally expect all proteins to follow soya prices but rape remains static which makes it competitive in the market. Again there has been interest in forward contracts.

Molasses: Massive demand for a very cost effective feed. Many customers are choosing high protein molasses to

substitute rapeseed meal in their diets. Currently a five working day lead time is required for molasses deliveries.

Wheat and barley: From towards the end of November grain prices have risen due to perhaps higher off-take of feed than predicted. However, concerns over the pig industry and alternative products being used may well keep prices in check for the rest of the winter.

Steve Symons
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(Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays)

Maize silage 2007

So is this year's maize silage any good? From what I've seen, some and some I would say.

We have all witnessed the very variable summer weather which provided a really challenging growing season for many areas. As a general rule, I have seen some of the best crops ever in dry soil and low rainfall areas, whilst the wetter soil, higher rainfall regions appear to have suffered with crop maturity, in some cases never reaching even near ripeness.

However biggest sin of all, seen year on year, is the all too eager harvesting of the plant! Many growers appear intent on judging harvest stage by the cob only, without consideration of plant condition. So what? Well, with varieties seemingly unstoppably becoming evermore "stay green," waiting for the plant to die off is more important than ever before to achieve optimum dry matter.

The digestibility value of crops and resultant ME are driven up (obviously) by greener, more digestible plant material. So earlier cut = more energy. This seems a good thing though right? After all, we nutritionists are always banging on about energy all the time.

The table below shows this year's maize analysis results so far against last years.

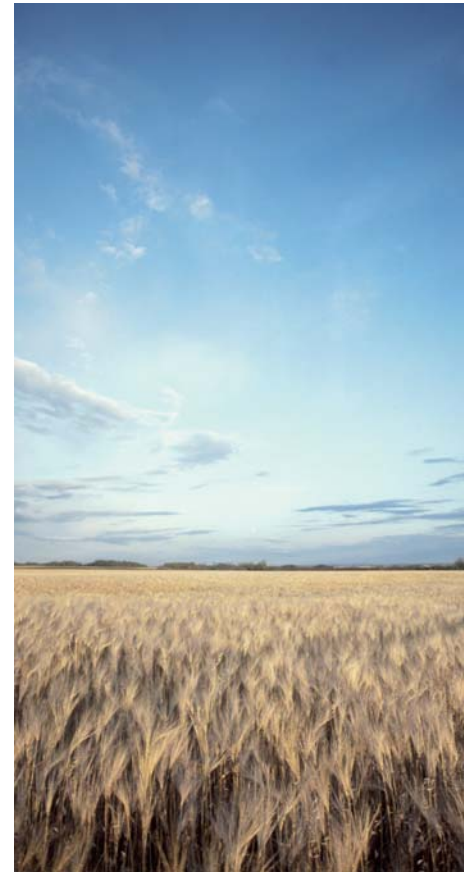
	06-07	07-08	Minimum	Maximum
Dry Matter %	33.9	28.6	15.3	45.0
Crude Protein %	7.9	8.0	6.4	11.1
D Value %	71.5	71.7	64.8	79.4
ME MJ/kg	11.3	11.3	10.2	12.8
Starch %	31.1	30.7	16.2	38.0
pH	4.2	3.9	3.5	4.3
Lactic Acid g/kg	31.6	43.2	0.5	101.6
PAL meq/kg	905.5	1030.7	651.5	1337.6
SIP g/kg0.75	107.4	101.0	80.8	127.7

The problem with considering this in isolation is that, whilst theoretically a better analysis is realised, greener, wetter plant material produces a much more acidic fermentation, increasing production of lactic acid. Lactic is a strong acid and as such drops the pH heavily in the clamp.

Some low dry matter crops this year are down as low as 3.5pH! Whilst crops are starchy enough, (i.e. the cob was ripe) the greenness of the plant is creating a really threatening problem – namely acidosis. Some very green plants harvested too early have very low dry matter, very high ME (which seems good) but excruciating acid loads, meaning feed out mightn't be as good as first expected from paper analysis.

Feeding such acidic material is at odds with everything we are trying to achieve with high yielding healthy cows. Intake of very acidic forage, such as prematurely cut maize silage means a real struggle to create the optimal rumen environment of pH 6.5. It also very heavily restricts the type and levels of concentrate intake consumable, thus massively restricting potential milk output.

Don't believe me? There is some data to back up my views...



The figures back up the general trends I've seen of crops being later maturing – at least two weeks, but maybe three weeks later than the previous year. Therefore harvesting on the 18th September because you always have done meant a premature harvest.

- 1) Lower dry matter, lower pH (3.9 down from 4.2 last year!) as a result of more lactic acid production. (Greener Plant)
- 2) Similar starch, although slightly lower than last year. (So cobs nearly ripe, but plant too green)
- 3) Same ME despite lower starch. (Greener plant misleadingly derives a higher D value & ME)
- 4) Potential Acid Load (PAL) increased as a result of higher lactic acid and lower pH
- 5) Intake potential (SIP) is reduced because of the acid load.

Charlie King, Three Counties Feeds
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Winter feeding tips

Getting the diet balanced this winter has in some cases been difficult. As cows have been housed full time a lot of fine-tuning has been done.

Until housing it has been difficult to gauge how much forage/mix the cows would eat when they have access to the ration 24/7. Grass silage this year has been disappointing and although maize silage yields were a little down the quality in the main has been good with high starch levels being reported.

Depending on the level of production required from the outside ration that will determine the amount and type of straights or blend that will need to be added to achieve a genuinely balanced ration. What is meant by "Genuinely balanced diet"? Balanced in terms of energy and protein as well as other

nutritional requirements is the aim, not always easy but never the less still remains the aim. Once the diet has been set-up it is then time to see how the cows react and adjust if necessary.

From time to time when things don't appear to be working as well as expected we need to delve a little further. Time spent looking at the finished mix can prove to be time well spent. Examining the mix when first fed and again later in the day occasionally highlights the amount of sorting that can happen how ever well the original mix was done.

In extreme cases what started off as a well-balanced well-mixed ration has ended being so well sorted ending up with cows in effect giving them acidosis. How ever unlikely this seems it can and has happened. If sorting is apparent consider the use of molasses as this can help.

Try not to over process the mix. This can alter the way the diet feeds and performance. Over processing can destroy the structure of the diet again this can impact on performance, quantity, quality and other associated problems.

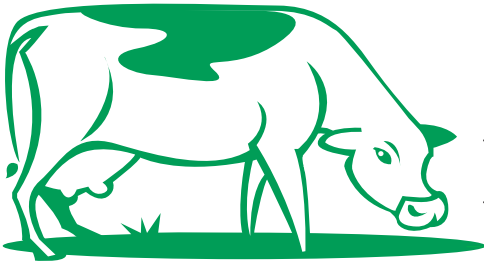
Introducing other sources of fibre into the mix can help in opening up the mix. Whatever the fibre source keep in mind the total balance of the ration and what you are trying to achieve from the diet.

Be as accurate as possible feeding the mix. Make sure the mixes are consistent. However tempting it might be to top up with forage alone try to avoid doing this, as it will affect the balance of the diet.

To coin a phrase "if it ain't broke don't fix it" but be prepared to revisit the diet from time to time.

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St David's December 2007

Farm Newsletter



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Health planning – discussing change

Most farms involved in the FHP project have now had their initial consultation and received, (or are soon to), a report and action plans for the key areas of fertility, mastitis, lameness, disease, nutrition and youngstock health.

At the very least we should have identified areas where there is scope for improvement. The difficult part is now agreeing on and implementing those action plans.

For busy farmers bombarded with costings and advice it is sometimes difficult to see where the benefit from change and usually spending money is going to come from, particularly for long term investments in fertility for example. Issues consistently argued have included – why is it necessary to aim for a 365 day calving interval? Why is using a

sweeper bull a bad idea for insurance against lower oestrus detection? Is it really cost effective to try and reduce a cell count which is not in penalty band? Why don't calves left to suckle their dams receive adequate colostrum? And sometimes we cannot agree!

The aim over the next few months will be to try and discuss those issues and more. We are planning a series of meetings through the winter which will be aimed at both providing answers from some expert speakers and also discussion between farmers about problems and solutions.

The provisional meetings we have planned are:

- Fertility discussion held in conjunction with the MDC using their experience from the PD+ project.
- A high SCC meeting where with help from mastitis consultants we will look at specific case studies of problems including contagious Staph aureus problems, high SCC in organic herds

and tackling environmental Strep uberis. It will be an ideal opportunity to ask questions particularly if problems are on going despite changes in management.

- Producing beef from the dairy industry – a talk with Eblex on bull selection, youngstock rearing and cull cows with input from the vets on bull fertility issues.
- A review of youngstock health and disease, costs and benefits of vaccination and what does biosecurity mean?
- Beef Health Meeting – the costs and benefits of health planning with Eblex.

The dates will be finalised soon so keep an eye on the newsletters. We will send out invites specifically to those farms with issues related to the meeting but they will be open to all, even those not involved in the FHP project. If there are specific issues you would like to have expert advice on, or just to discuss in a forum with other farmers please email emily@stdavids-vets.co.uk.

