



Dairy Briefs

The Latest Information on Dairy Cattle Nutrition



More Milk = More Cows = More Forage

Laura Martin, M.Sc



Since March 2015, dairy producers have been given 12% more quota, not including the extra incentive days. Many producers have added more cows to the herd to help meet the extra production require-

ments. While this is a great opportunity for dairy producers (and contractors that build dairy barns), something that producers may not have accounted for is the extra feed they will need to support these extra cows. Even with the decent yields from the 2016 harvest season, it is important to keep an eye on forage inventories this year.

The trend in recent years has been to push for milk cow rations with higher forage levels. As ruminants, dairy cows possess the ability to take forage fibre and convert it into useful energy. Increasing the forage level seems like a good way to decrease costs, as forages are often considered the cheapest feeds on farm. However, what options do producers have when forage supplies may be limited?

The first step is to figure out an accurate inventory of the forage supplies on farm; of hay, straw, haylage and corn silage. If you know how much forage you've got going in, and monitor it closely throughout the year, it will be easier to provide the cows with

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By: Laura Martin, M. Sc, Nutritionist



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69819 London Road, RR #1, Centralia, Ontario, Canada, N0M 1K0

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consistent feed quality. An easy way to monitor usage throughout the year is to mark the bunk wall, or count the rings on silos, and then check again in a week, to see how much feed has been used. From there, it is easy to figure out if the forage level is going down too fast. Communicate with your nutritionist as to what levels of forage can be fed to get the cows through to the next harvest. It is better to feed less all year than to run out of forage three months before harvest.

Feeding a lower forage diet, if balanced properly, doesn't have to result in the infamous "killer cow" ration. Before the move to high forage diets, it was common to feed over 25% of the dry matter as corn. Corn is an excellent source of starch and is easily fermented by the rumen microbes to produce energy; which translates into milk production. While rumen microbes can

also make energy from forages, if the forage supply is not there, then transitioning the cows to a higher grain diet can be a good alternative.

There are some health concerns that can be associated with feeding high grain, or more accurately, high starch diets. An increased risk of acidosis is associated with higher starch diets. The rumen microbes are able to quickly ferment the starch which makes the rumen more acidic. This can impact milk production and butterfat levels. High starch diets are also associated with lameness in cows as it can impact the connective tissue in the hooves. However, high starch can also occur in diets with a lot of forage, if they have high levels of corn silage. Feeding higher grain diets can be done if cows are transitioned slowly over time, to allow the rumen microbes time to adapt to the higher starch levels. There are also feed additives that can help keep the rumen stable, like sodium bicarbonate and yeast products. If forage supply is a concern, it is a good



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time to discuss making these changes with your nutritionist.

Making use of some low starch, high fibre co-products can really help keep lower forage diets within “healthy” limits and help keep costs down. A comparison of a high (65%) forage diet against a low (50%) forage diet can be seen in Table 1. Both diets are balanced with 50:50 corn silage to haylage and similar energy and protein levels. By using co-products, such as corn gluten feed and cottonseed, in the 50% forage diet, the fibre and starch levels are still within “healthy” limits. It is possible to feed a well-balanced low forage ration, without blowing the udders off the cows, or a hole in your wallet. Using current market costs, the 50% forage diet has slightly lower feed cost than the 65% forage diet (Table 1).

Cows require nutrients, not ingredients. If forage supply is limited, feeding more grain is an option. It is important to monitor your forage levels on farm and communicate with your nutritionist about what levels can be fed. Slowly transitioning cows over to higher grain levels will help prevent health problems and allow the rumen microbes time to adapt. Using co-products, like corn gluten feed, can help cut costs and optimize starch levels.

Table 1: A High Forage Diet Compared to a Low Foarge Diet

	65 % Forage	50% Forage
Straw (kg)	--	0.75
Haylage (kg)	17.88	12.99
Corn Silage (kg)	17.88	12.99
Dry Corn (kg)	4.70	6.17
Soybean Meal (kg)	1.68	1.47
DDGS (kg)	0.84	0.73
Canola Meal (kg)	0.84	0.73
Corn Gluten Feed (kg)	--	2.00
Cottonseed (kg)	--	1.00
Vitamin/Mineral Premix 1 (kg)	0.554	--
Vitamin/Mineral Premix 2 (kg)	--	0.530
Liquid Fat (kg)	0.25	--
Dry Matter Intake	22.52	22.52
Crude Protein (%DM)	17.00	17.00
NDF (% DM)	31.90	32.40
ADF (% DM)	20.00	19.00
Starch (% DM)	22.00	24.40
NE Lactation (Mcal/kg)	1.68	1.70
Feed Cost per Head per Day	\$5.37	\$5.33

*Commodity costs based on current market prices.



Reaping the Rewards of Robotics with Kenpal's Dairy Program

James Smith runs Maple Croft Farms Ltd., a 75 milking cow operation near Wyoming, ON. He switched to Kenpal in 2012, because Larry Merner was highly recommended to him when he was having chronic fresh cow and breeding problems. He has been working with Larry, one of Kenpal's dairy specialists, ever since and he uses Kenpal's line of ruminant vitamin/mineral premixes for his milk cows, dry cows and heifers.



Larry Merner & James Smith

In May 2015, James moved the cows out of the tie-stall barn and into a new robotic milking barn. "When Larry said we could get 40 L/cow I never thought it was possible. We got 40 L, and then we hit 46 L."

James started using Kenpal's Robot Pellet before the cows even moved into the new barn. The pellets contain Kenpal's Herbageum Condiment flavouring agent. When asked about Kenpal's Robot Pellet, James says, "My cows really like going to the robot; the herd is always over 3 visits per day. I seldom have any fetch cows."

It's not just Kenpal's products that James likes, the service is great and the staff is knowledgeable. "My sales guy comes out every 2 weeks to look things over," that way any questions can be answered right away.

James looks forward to continuing his relationship with Kenpal and seeing just what quality nutrition can do for his herd.

James Smith
Maple Croft Farms Ltd.
Wyoming



Kenpal Farm Products Inc., 69819 London Rd, RR #1 Centralia, ON, N0M 1K0
Tel: 519-228-6444 • Toll Free: 1-800-265-2904 • Fax: 519-228-6560
kpalen@kenpal.on.ca • www.kenpal.on.ca

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