

Have you got enough forage?

With all the recent dry weather, dairy farmers need to seriously consider whether they have enough forage in stock. That was the stark warning from SAC dairy consultant, Jimmy Goldie, who was speaking at a recent DairyCo forecasting meeting.

With the first six months of 2010 being the driest since 1929 there is huge pressure on grass growth, resulting in shortages of grazing at the current time, he explained.

This dry weather, combined with the late spring, has resulted in first cut grass silage yields being depressed, with average crops only yielding 60-70% of normal tonnage.

"Although turnout was late and April yields were down around 10m litres across the country, May performance was good as a result of excellent growing conditions," Jimmy explained. "But since then the picture has been more troubling. Grass has stopped growing in many areas and some producers are having to graze land that they would have shut up for second cut. This could result in major forage shortages later in the year and over the winter, which will have a corresponding impact on milk production."

Ian Browne from the Farm Consultancy Group agreed. "Whilst the quality of first cut silages seems to be very good, stocks are low," he commented. "And with no reliable rain forecast until late August, many farmers are facing forage shortages next winter."

Ian urged producers to assess

their available stocks now and consider how they can secure sufficient forage for the winter.

"You need to know exactly what you are going to have available and then secure available alternatives now to guarantee continuity of supply," he said.

But that may be easier said than done. Brewers grains are becoming hard to get hold of

and alternative forage replacers such as pressed beet pulp are likely to be very expensive. Straw is also likely to be at a premium as the dry weather has resulted in short crops.

"It is really important that milk producers deal with this issue now and plan ahead," Ian commented. "If forage shortages are not addressed, cows will have to be rationed in the

truest sense of the word as the season develops and young stock feeding may become difficult and expensive."

"This is likely to result in cows losing condition as well as yield, and this may have a knock on impact on long term fertility and future performance," he concluded. "It is therefore essential that dairy farmers plan ahead."



Market update

In recent months the world dairy markets have experienced strong performance. There is good demand in world markets and low stocks as a carry over from last year's poor prices. As a result, commodity markets are generally performing strongly, with butterfat prices particularly high, due to short supply.

In early June the EU commission started selling intervention stocks of butter and SMP by fortnightly tender. At the time of writing, around 24,000t of butter has been sold through two separate tenders, with the second seeing 12,000t sold at a price of £2,955/tonne - up £80/t compared to the first. Intervention butter stocks are now down to only 1,734t, although around 51,000t remains in the 'deprived persons scheme'.

The commission rejected June's skim milk powder tenders as none of the bids reached the current market price for skim milk trading (around £1870/t), and as a result nearly 80,000t of SMP as well as remaining butter stocks will be re-tendered in July.

Meanwhile, the milk production season in Oceania has wound down and most plants are currently closed for winter maintenance. Stocks of butterfat are particularly tight in NZ and Australia and they will continue to set the world prices for butterfat whilst this remains the case.

Milk supply in NZ is stable, whilst Australian production is down around 4% year on year, although recent wet weather there has seen the gap start to narrow. Much more rain is needed though to avoid drought problems next summer.

And, whilst it is still too early to tell what production in

Oceania may do next season, as it is so dependent upon the weather, world output is forecast to rise some 1.8 per cent during 2010, largely as a result of increased production in Asia. US output also continues to grow and they are likely to be a net exporter in the future.

Closer to home, RPA figures show that June production was up by 48.6m litres on last year and cumulative non-adjusted production for the quota year is 3,553.2m litres, 77.2m litres up on the same period last year.

Yet domestic production is likely to drop if the dry weather continues, and shortages of forage (see article overleaf) may see this becoming a sustained trend for the rest of the quota year.

And there are signs that world dairy markets may have peaked. The Fonterra auction in early July saw a 13.8 per cent drop in dairy prices compared to the previous month and the United Dairy Farmers auction in NI showed a 4.3% drop month on month.

Yet with so much uncertainty over domestic and global output levels in the next few months and continued shortages of stock in world markets volatility of market prices is likely to continue. We will continue to monitor the situation carefully to ensure that we can take best advantage of market developments moving forward.

Is Johne's disease costing you money?

What is Johne's disease?

Johne's disease is an infectious wasting condition that damages the intestines of infected cows resulting in diarrhoea, loss of condition, reduced milk yield and infertility.

Infection is caused by *Mycobacterium avium* sub-species *paratuberculosis* (MAP) and typically occurs in young animals through ingestion from infected faeces or milk. The progression is usually very slow with the majority of animals not becoming clinically ill until between two and six years of age.

Why prevent it?

The disease can have a significant economic impact on farm, with even sub-clinical infection causing loss of output, poor health and early culling. Industry data suggests production losses of 10 per cent for animals suffering sub-clinical Johne's and a further 20 per cent for those with clinical cases. Infected herds will also typically see involuntary culling driven by mastitis, lameness and infertility, when Johne's disease is the underlying problem.

What's being done?

Johne's is now present within many UK dairy herds, but infection status is still unclear for many farms.

The dairy industry has formed an Action Group on Johne's to develop a national control programme for the disease. Many milk buyers are also analysing bulk payment samples to assess MAP levels and NML offers a Johne's Screening Programme.

This programme is available to farmers through their vet and aims to allow farmers to manage Johne's infection to reduce re-infection and minimise culling.

The scheme is based on the use of individual cow samples with a whole herd test every three months. Results are analyzed and cows are grouped according to antibody levels. There are six antibody groups (J0 - J5), with J5 cows deemed to be the most infectious cows in the herd whilst J0 cows are likely to be uninfected (and not infectious to other cows or calves).

For more information on Johne's visit <http://tinyurl.com/3383hma> or call Meadow Foods on **01244 629 416**.

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