

Combination of grazing and housing works well

In spite of the publicity around the two extremes of dairy farming – housing all year on TMR, or extended grazing New Zealand style – the majority of farms are somewhere in between.

This generally works well. However, there is often scope to use some of the ideas from both of the more specialized systems to make better use of feeds, including grazed grass.

There is a slight trend towards keeping cows indoors. It's definitely easier to maintain a routine, and to keep feeding consistent, but there are very few cubicle sheds that catch the light, ventilation and cow comfort of pasture, and the benefits in terms of health and production this brings – even in the rain.

Grazing high-yielding cows does present some challenges, but there are many reasons for overcom-

VETERINARY ADVICE

Kath Aplin, of Paragon Veterinary Group, offers advice on the merits of housing cows all year versus extended grazing

ing these challenges, not least the sight of cows enjoying the sunshine.

Now that we've got winter feeding about right, does milk have to drop off in the spring?

It's worth considering the cost and time associated with making silage and housing and feeding cattle full time, and weighing that against any drop in yield. That said, it should be possible to maintain yields with effective use of grass and a buffer feed.

Does paddock grazing have a place in a high-yielding herd?

Certainly. The use of paddocks in a rotational grazing system reduces wastage and

encourages more uniform grazing, helping to stimulate a better grass crop later in the season, particularly if grazed hard in the spring and autumn.

Using paddocks is not exclusive to all grass systems. Splitting the herd into high and low yielders allows the high yielders access to the best pasture plus supplementation, while the low yielders graze harder to make best use of the available grass. **Where can I find out about installing better tracks to improve access to pasture?**

Installing good cow tracks makes grazing more accessible and reduces damage to both pasture and feet.



ADVICE: Kath Aplin, of Paragon Veterinary Group

DairyCo has a booklet on cow tracks available on their website.

How much can I expect from grass?

A good-quality sward can provide for maintenance, plus 25 litres – though this does depend on good grass quality (12ME) and good grazing management (based on cows eating 17kgDM, 75MJ needed for mainte-

nance, plus 5MJ per litre). **Should I change parlour cake at turnout?**

Spring grass is high in rumen degradable protein (RDP), but relatively low in fibre, so the right sort of cake to supplement spring grass would have a relatively high ME and fibre content. Some bypass protein, such as soya, is useful for high yields.

What's the best way to supplement grass for high-yielding cows?

To avoid feeding excessive amounts of concentrate to high-yielders, a TMR can be used to supplement grass. It should be specifically formulated for the purpose, and should be different to the winter ration.

If there's plenty of good-quality grazing available there's no need to feed grass silage. It has a lower nutritional value than fresh grass, and will cause cows to eat less grass.

Supplementing with grass silage is only useful if there is insufficient grass available or as part of a TMR if cows are housed part-time.

A good TMR to supplement grass could be based on maize silage or whole-crop, to provide fibre and starch, with some protein and energy supplementation, such as soya and molasses.

Cows tend to graze most enthusiastically in the morning and late evening, so feeding TMR early evening after milking takes advantage of this.

As costs of fuel, feed and labour increase, it makes sense to consider how to make the best use of grazed grass, whatever your type of farm.

For more details, Dairyco has information on grass and grazing on its website at dairyco.org.uk and in its grass+ publication, available free to dairy farmers and their advisers.

Blowfly report offers key measures to manage condition

A REPORT into blowfly strike by a group of leading sheep flock health experts aims to help farmers manage the condition and protect the future profitability of the UK sheep industry.

The new report Protecting the Future of Your Flock: Blowfly Strike in the Spotlight, commissioned by Novartis Animal Health, is by a panel which includes Prof Richard Wall, a lecturer in the School of Biological Sciences at Bristol University, Dr Fiona Lovatt, an independent sheep consultant and vice-president of the Sheep Veterinary Society, and Joe Henry, of Alnothumbria Vet Group and partner and executive committee member of the Sheep Veterinary Society.

The report identifies key issues experienced by farmers, including unpredictable weather patterns making the timing of blowfly treatment

difficult; the increasing risk of treatment resistance; and the problem of treating parasites too late in the season. It found that 86 per cent of farmers agreed the blowfly season had changed over the past five years and that 79 per cent believed it was starting earlier and finishing later. Fifty-nine per cent of farmers have reported a case of strike as late as October, and almost a third as late as November.

Veterinary manager for Novartis Animal Health, Fiona Anderson, said: "The report sums up that sheep farmers need to think 'prepare, predict, prevent' when treating their flock for blowfly. This means they should arm themselves with the facts and put in place a parasite protection plan, know the triggers that are most relevant to their flock and act early."

"Prevention is always best in the case of blowfly strike

because adult flies can lay so many eggs on a sheep and strike can establish very quickly. Blowfly strike can be easily prevented through the use of products which contain insect growth regulators. These prevent the development of the damaging second and third stage maggots, which are responsible for causing fly strike and stock damage."

The report makes three recommendations:

- Prepare: arm yourself with the facts and put in a parasite protection plan;
- Predict: know the triggers that are most relevant to your flock;
- Prevent: plan ahead and act early.

To request a copy of the report, contact Novartis Animal Health on 01276-694402. For more information on blowfly strike, visit farmanimalhealth.co.uk/sheep-blowfly.

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