

Beware of Silage Quality, according to Bretts Ruminant Support Team

With the long summer days and very dry autumn many farmers have long forgotten the terrible spring. However, Bretts Nutritionist, Heather Peppard and her technical team are seeing the real effects of the wet spring as silage results come back and pits are opened. Poor grazing conditions and under utilisation of grass this spring delayed closing off silage ground and high rainfall in May delayed the harvest of first cut silage which impacted on quality.

Bretts Ruminant Support Specialists, Michael Foley and David Lawrence have analysed a large sample of silages which show dry matter (DM) of first cut grass silage is back 5% this year compared to 2013. The digestibility of grass silage or DMD as it is commonly referred to, is back 2% units nationally. Michael says that his clients in Waterford, Wexford and South Kilkenny who normally harvest silage in mid May to achieve a guaranteed 70% DMD were forced to delay cutting into late May and early June, which resulted in a reduction of 5-8% DMD and an increased fibre component, reported as NDF on the silage analysis due to the increase of stem. Although the quality of silage is certainly reduced this year the preservation of silage in general appears to be unaffected.

So what impact does reduced silage quality have on farms? First and foremost we advise



Bretts Ruminant Support Specialist Michael Foley pictured with Area Reps PJ Barron and Seamus Whitty

farmers to get silage analysed. Based on the results farmers should make decisions within their own farm gate by considering what livestock they have to winter and the expected performance in terms of milk yield or liveweight gain.

A reduction in silage quality of 5% units of DMD has devastating effects in terms of expected animal performance and supplementation required to maintain expected weight gain as described on Table 1. For finishing cattle expected to do 1 kg of daily gain Michael Foley has seen down through

the years that the amount of meal feeding required to bridge the gap is 2kgs per animal per day.

David Lawrence advises dairy farmers to group dry cows according to body condition and feed according to the recommendations in Table 2. Silage with 64-68 DMD, is capable of maintaining body condition on dry cows during the winter provided that they are in a body condition score of 3.0 but it is important to body condition all cows as they are dried off, pay particular attention to second calvers.

Michael and David are fully aware of quota constraints on the majority of dairy farms and along with Heather they are inundated with queries from dairy farmers as to how to deal with this difficult scenario. On a positive note the very good grazing conditions this autumn have meant that farmers have saved on silage and there appears to be sufficient silage stocks on the most farms.

Production system	70% DMD	65% DMD
Weanling	1kg	2kg
Finishing Cattle	5kg	7kg
Dairy Cow, (27 litres)	7.5kg	8.5kg

Table 1. Recommended supplementation rates for high and average quality grass silage



Bretts Area Rep John Dillon and Ruminant Support Specialist David Lawrence pictured with Kilkenny farmer James Tynan.

Silage Quality	Poor Cond BCS < 2.5	Moderate Cond BCS ~ 2.75	Good Cond BCS > 3.0
Recommended Dry period	Min 12 weeks	8 – 10 weeks	8 weeks
>72 DMD	Silage + 1kg	Silage ad lib	Restrict Silage
68 DMD	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg	Silage ad lib
64 DMD	Silage + 3kg	Silage + 2kg	Silage ad lib
60 DMD	Not recommended	Silage + 3kg	Silage + 1kg

Table 2. Recommended supplementation rates for dry cows based on body condition and silage quality

Mineral feeding this winter

- All stock housed over the winter and fed silage should be supplemented with minerals and vitamins. If beet, maize silage, crimped grain or wholecrop silages are fed stock will require additional supplementation of calcium, phosphorus and possibly rumen buffers.
- For weanlings and young-stock calcium, phosphorus and Vitamin D are essential for good skeletal development
- In beef animals, the correct balance of sodium, calcium and magnesium is essential to maintain a stable rumen. The inclusion of specific rumen buffers prevents the onset of acidosis and combined with the trace mineral zinc, prevents lameness in finishing cattle
- Lactating dairy and suckler cows have a very high demand for all minerals and vitamins in early lactation, especially in the lead up to breeding. Magnesium must be supplemented to prevent grass tetany in high risk periods Eg. sucklers being weaned or dairy cows on spring grass in wet conditions
- For suckler and dairy cows approaching calving, it is essential that a specific 'Dry Cow' mineral and vitamin mix is fed for a minimum of 6 weeks before calving. Vitamin E and selenium are critical components as they enhance the immunity of the cow, helping her to fight infections after calving such as mastitis and metritis. Vitamin E and selenium also enhance the quality of the biestings, passing on this 'natural' immunity booster to the newborn calf. It is well known that a high level of Magnesium (minimum 22%) helps to prevent the onset of milk fever but Bretts experience is that Phosphorus and Vitamin D3 are also required in high levels to prevent sub-clinical milk fever appearing in the form of retained placentas and displaced abomasums.



Bretts Ruminant Support Specialist David Lawrence pictured with Area Reps Joe Pollard and PJ Quinlan

Bretts coarse rations or cubes that you purchase are fortified with the correct minerals and vitamins for specific stock

Bretts have a full range of molassed minerals and vitamins that can be fed at a daily fixed rate on top of silage (PIP Dry Cow Minerals, Supreme Pre-Calver, Hi-Phos balancers for maize/beet). Please seek advice about the correct level of minerals to feed to your stock

Alternatively minerals can be offered in the form of free access molassed mineral buckets (Hi-Mag, Pre-Calver, Calf-Beef, Sheep)

New for Winter 2014/15

- Bretts Pre-Calver supreme mineral has recently been improved by increasing Magnesium and Phosphorus levels and Vitamin E levels
- The unique Bretts PIP (performance improvement pack) Dry Cow mineral and vitamin supplement, is now fortified with Seaweed for this coming season. The 'Seaweed' component provides trace minerals, vitamins and amino acids in a unique and natural form that has been shown to improve the availability of these nutrients to the cow and her unborn calf.

Bretts offer a range of options, so please speak to your Sales Rep for further advice.



Bretts Ruminant Support Specialist Michael Foley pictured with Wexford farmers Colm & Pat Murphy and Bretts Area Rep Michael Barron

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