

Instant on-farm forage analysis the route to better feeding



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The variation in silage feed value within even a single clamp can be substantial. The latest data shows key parameters like dry matter (DM) differing by as much as 10% from the top to the bottom of the clamp, and by as much as 8% from middle to the sides, with similar changes when moving back through the clamp.

Since even a 2.5% reduction in silage dry matter can cut yields by 2 litres/cow in a herd averaging 30 litres/day, the potential impact on overall winter milk output – and profitability – is huge.

Yet the typical routine for monitoring feed value involves just a single combined sample from across the clamp face when the nutrition advisor visits once a month. Sent away for analysis, the results are received 2-3 days later, with reformulated rations then emailed to the farm ready for use the next time rations are mixed... usually 3-4 days after the sample was taken!

This time lag has serious implications. New ration formulations are already up to four days old by the time they're used, and will be more than 30 days out of date by the time the next advisor visit comes around.

One of the biggest opportunities to improve feeding precision therefore comes from increasing forage testing frequency and reducing the time lag between testing and reformulating rations. More samples analysed also means greater accuracy as the number of results builds up and trends in feed value become clearer.

Thanks to the new portable NIR spectrometer, NIR4 Farm, it's now possible for any advisor to analyse silage samples on-farm in just five minutes. Add maybe 30-45 minutes for reformulation and an updated ration can be ready in well under an hour!

In fact, the process is so quick that it's entirely possible to consider it being done on a weekly basis, and the impact on consistency of nutrient supply, cow performance and, ultimately, profitability can be substantial.

Imagine rations only ever being a maximum of seven days out of date? Now that really would be a major step forward for precision feeding.

For more information on the NIR4 Farm portable spectrometer phone 028 94 473 478.



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