

Maximise milk from forage to give margins a boost



Dr Nicola Walker, AB Vista Ruminant Product Development Manager

Faced with continuing low milk prices, maximising production from forage is a major focus for most milk producers this winter and a key factor in keeping feed costs down and margins up.

Reports of extremely low feed value grass silages in Scotland may have been overstated, but those forages are still below average and holding back production. Where better summer weather boosted the feed value of early first cut silages, such as in the south of England, low dry matters and high levels of acidity are also causing problems due to the increased risk of sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA).

In both cases, rumen fermentation efficiency and the conversion of all feed into milk is being compromised, and profitability is going to suffer as a consequence.

Reducing the impact of SARA and optimising the breakdown of forage fibre in the rumen is therefore absolutely critical this winter. Any time rumen pH drops below 5.8, the activity and number of fibre-digesting microbes is reduced and fibre digestion is compromised.

Getting the composition of the diet right is essential, and particular care will be needed if looking to make greater use of cheap cereals – excessive cereal starch is often a key factor in triggering SARA. If silages are also acidic or there are other factors increasing the SARA risk, consider using Acid Buf slow-release rumen conditioner to help maintain rumen pH.

High D-value silages are also likely to benefit from inclusion of Vistacell, a metabolically active yeast, to help increase the number of fibre digesting microbes. In fact, research has shown that using a yeast and rumen conditioner together (as Vistacell AB) rather than just a yeast alone, can work together to improve feed efficiency by a further 3%.

Where silage quality is low, however, one of the best options to improve fibre digestion is to add a forage pre-treatment to the ration before feeding. This enables faster and improved colonisation of fibre by rumen microbes, with trials using VistaPre-T showing increases of up to 11% in feed efficiency, depending on initial forage quality.

For more information on Acid Buf, Vistacell or VistaPre-T phone 02894 473 478.

The AB Vista logo consists of the text 'ABVista' in a white, sans-serif font, positioned inside a blue, rounded, teardrop-shaped graphic element.

ABVista

www.abvista.com