

# Rumen pH stability critical to maximising milk from forage



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With many grass silages both low in dry matter and acidic, there's been a significant increase in the risk of low rumen pH and sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA) this winter. It's a risk that's further increased if high levels of rolled cereals are being fed.

Cereals may be a cheap way to boost ration energy levels where silage feed value is low, but the level of starch in the ration needs to be carefully managed, particularly if silages are wet, acidic and have high PAL (potential acid load) values.

Avoiding extended periods of time when the rumen is below the point at which fibre digestion is compromised (pH 5.8) and minimising the incidence of SARA (below pH 5.5) therefore needs to be a top priority.

In fact, by improving rumen fermentation efficiency and maximising milk from forage, it's likely to have more impact on minimising bought-in feed costs than any switch to cheap cereals!

Balancing ration energy supply is extremely important. Include digestible fibre as well as starch, plus sugars to help drive microbial activity and at least 2 kg/cow/day of chopped wheat straw to stimulate rumination and good rumen function by providing scratch factor.

The challenge is that the high energy densities needed to support 30-40 litres/cow/day mean a significant SARA risk even if rations are well-balanced. When silages are acidic, that challenge becomes even greater.

That's why many herds now routinely include a slow-release rumen conditioner or metabolically active yeast in the ration to help stabilise rumen pH. The result is better efficiency, reduced waste and higher margin over feed costs.

In a trial carried out at the University of Georgia using early lactation Holsteins fed an acidotic ration, adding the slow release conditioner Acid Buf to the ration increased daily fat-corrected milk yield by 4.3 kg/cow without any additional feed intake. Other trials by Schothorst Feed Research in the Netherlands have shown that adding Vistacell yeast in addition to Acid Buf can improve feed conversion efficiency by a further 3%.

At a time when maximising the conversion of all feed into milk is critical, they're the sort of gains that few can afford to ignore.

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



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