

Organic Centre Wales Producer Conference 2009: Adapt and Survive

Aberystwyth, 15 October 2009

Workshop report: Making the most of organic feed

Chairman: Heather McCalman.

Gillian Butler; Nafferton Ecological Farming Group, Newcastle University: Adapt and Survive; Improving the use of forage

Why make the most of forages? Within an organic system 60% of intake for ruminants must be forage, and with their internal systems built for forages, it is healthier, and holds a cost benefit. The forages that are produced on farm should be utilised appropriately, according to quality of forage, and identifying which classes of livestock need supplementation.

Grazing : Avoid under or over utilisation, consider extended and deferred grazing along with grazed forage crops.

Silage: There is a loss in feeding value and intake in comparison with the grazed grass. The need for supplementation depends on quality and expected performance.

Making better silage : Cutting earlier provides more energy. Cutting later increases the protein levels. Higher intakes can be achieved with better fermentation, inclusion of clover, and appropriate chop length.

Supplementing forage : Importance of minerals and trace elements. Deficient stock do not thrive. Identify deficiency with herbage samples in May / June. Target supplementation if necessary.

Summary

- Make the most of grazing
- Improve winter forage
- Assess silage quality
- Target supplementation
- Consider appropriate breeds
- Investigate benefits of co-operation and networks – Bulk buying / Sourcing feeds direct from growers
- Growers speaking to feed companies

Mark Measures, IOTA: What does research tell us?

IOTA : Institute of Organic Training and Advice www.organicadvice.org.uk ; An independent organisation supporting the work of all organic advisers.

Database of all organic research www.orgprints.org

Feeding : 100% organic feed. Consider forage quality, the use of cereals, form of feeding and protein levels.

Trace Elements : Health aspect for livestock. Availability in herbs. Direct supplement through frpd / bolus / injection. Soil additions.

Soil : A soil analysis will give a picture of the minerals in the ground. Consider type of analysis, complex or basic. Ensure an organic interpretation of the analysis. Look at soil biology and structure.

Grass Clover Leys : Ensure complimenting grass species with legume species. Establishment of ley is vital.

Herbal Pasture : Consider yield, quality, minerals, drought, health benefits. Quality of meat, vitamins, CLA and flavour.

Other sources of information; ADAS / ORC / OCW

Ernie Gibbons: A farmer's experiences

132 ha lowland farm on Anglesey, family run farm, 45%LFA. Tir Gofal 5yr agreement. Organic since 2001. Limousine cattle, oldest registered herd in the UK. Changed to organic, to increase value of product, and move away from intensive cattle rearing.

Rotation is 11 years:

- 1 Spring Barley undersown with rye grass
 - 2 Spring Barley undersown with red clover and a high sugar grass
 - 3 red clover and a high sugar grass
 - 4 red clover and a high sugar grass
 - 5 red clover and a high sugar grass
 - 6 Forage Peas & cereal (barley or triticale) undersown with a white clover & grass mix
 - 7 white clover & grass mix
 - 8 white clover & grass mix
 - 9 white clover & grass mix
 - 10 white clover & grass mix
 - 11 white clover & grass mix
 - 12 stubble turnips (grazing for youngstock)
- Then back to Barley
Mineral supplement with iodine due to deficiency

Animal health has improved due to less intensive system

Selling cattle : 380-400 steers, 350-360 heifers

Questions to all three speakers

Q: How important is soya?

A: More important within a dairy system, cow producing 6000 l needs quality protein. An alternative could be rape meal. For pigs and poultry there are less alternatives. IN beef and sheep systems there are other alternatives, e.g. growing red clover

NB Importance of silage analysis: With high quality silage, there is very little need for much concentrate, the barley is used more as a management tool to keep the livestock quieter.

Q: What is the position with using Seaweed?

A: You must check that the product conforms with your organic certification standards. Iodine in the product. Can be quite expensive. When offered in buckets it will be self regulating. 100% digestible.

Q: Soil Analysis

A: A general NPK and pH analysis will show you what you need, and the trends on your farm, the more complex analyses have little more to add.

Q: Basic slag vs Rock phosphate

A: Phosphate is more available when supplied in the form of rock phosphate. Basic Slag has a lower % of phosphate in it, but higher pH.