

Feed Budgeting Before It's Too Late

The poor weather over the past few months has caused many farms to house stock earlier than anticipated. It has also hampered silage making efforts, resulting in some farms having lower forage stocks than usual. Going forward into winter it is essential to know you have enough forage to see the stock through until next spring.

Supply

The first issue is supply of feed. Calculate how much silage there is for the winter. Having marks on a silage pit wall is a good way to assess how quickly a pit is being used. Having silage analysed regularly is vital to know the dry matter of the silage. This allows rations to be altered to use the forage required to meeting performance targets.

Next the pit needs to be measured to calculate the volume in cubic metres (length x width x height). Next multiply this fresh weight density (from the table below) and then divide by the dry matter. This will give the total tonnes of dry matter in a pit.

Volume x Density/DM = Dry Matter tonnes

Silage Density (tonnes/m³)

DM%	Clamp Height			
	2.0	2.5	3.0	4.0
20	0.780	0.840	0.890	0.950
25	0.690	0.730	0.775	0.830
30	0.620	0.660	0.690	0.740
35	0.570	0.600	0.625	0.670
40+	0.520	0.550	0.570	0.610

For bales weigh 5 bales. This can be done with weigh cell bars from a crush or in a mixer waggon. Take the average weight of the bales and multiply this by the number of bales. Then divide by dry matter.

Average bale weight x number of bales/DM = Dry matter tonnes

Demand

Having rations made up for all stock will allow accurate feeding of forage stocks and optimise animal performance. Add up the total silage required in a day. Divide this by the total silage in pit. This will give you the number of days of silage available.

If this leaves a shortfall towards the usual turnout date there are a number of options to see you through.

All options should be considered now. Leaving this until January only compounds the issue making the problem worse. If other farms are in the same boat it will also increase the cost of silage to be purchased. 2017 has had one of the wettest summers on record. The other two years with similar summers (1985 and 2012) both had late cold springs in the next year. Perhaps it is worth feed budgeting to allow for this?

If you require help in calculating your feed budgets contact your local office who can help.

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Not Able To Make Hay/Silage?

Some areas on the west coast have been so wet producers have been struggling to make silage or hay recently. The obvious consequence is a severe shortage of forage to overwinter stock but, equally important, is the impact this has had on the performance of animals this summer. With fields still “shut up” for conservation there have been no aftermaths for stock to graze this autumn. As a result grass intakes for perhaps the last 2 months have been severely restricted, all of which will have had a direct impact on performance, be it growth rates, fertility or cow/ewe condition.

In this situation some points to consider would be –

1. Sell all lambs/calves store. To maximise sale weights start creep feeding ASAP.
2. Check cow/ewe condition now and if they are lean wean ASAP but ensure calves/lambs have been on creep feed for at least 3 weeks before weaning.
3. PD all cows now and cull all barren animals ASAP before prices begin to fall with the autumn glut.
4. Be particularly hard when drawing ewes to go to the tup this autumn. Only keep the fittest ewes.
5. Investigate opportunities for away wintering which will usually be cheaper than buying feed into remote areas.
6. Concentrates are much cheaper per unit of energy/protein to transport than roughage.
7. Consider strip grazing unharvested silage ground rather than trying to make very poor quality silage in wet conditions. Use a back fence to minimise poaching.
8. If required supplement the standing grass with purchased concentrate.
9. If ground conditions allow, consider mowing 2 or 3 swaths for the next few days, placing an electric fence in the middle of each swath to act as a feed barrier. This will minimise wastage, leave a uniform mown sward to regrow ready for the spring and reduce poaching.
10. Consider a similar approach, similar to all grass wintering, for the ewes.

Most important of all review your future conservation policy. Some questions to consider would be –

- Would it be better cutting earlier and even moving towards a 2 cut system?
- Would a long term away wintering for a portion or all stock be more resistant to extreme weather and more profitable?
- Would undersown, cracked wholecrop provide a more reliable forage, and reduce the requirement of straw bedding?
- Can breeding stock be outwintered eg all grass wintering, strip grazing forage crops eg kale, swedes, etc.

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This article is from SAC's monthly publication Sheep & Beef News. If you would like more information or to subscribe please contact Val Angus on 01835 823322 or val.angus@sac.co.uk