

Alfalfa Compliments Dairy Grain Rations

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NEWARK, Del. — Now that your first and second cuttings of hay and, or haylage are in, how can you use them to maximize net income from milk production?

Alfalfa is rightly called the queen of all dairy feeds, while corn silage is usually considered king. The two reign supreme in feeding our best cows the best way. But just how should you incorporate them into your feeding program—especially alfalfa?

When corn silage is fed as the only forage, high milking cows may eat up to 65 pounds per day, but they need additional grain supplementation to meet their nutrient needs. A satisfactory 22 percent crude protein mixture would include 1,075 pounds shelled corn, 805 pounds soybean oil meal, and 120 pounds of a mineral mixture (½ dical and limestone and ¼ each buffers and trace mineralized salt).

When feeding both corn silage and alfalfa—a preferred practice in this area and in our University of Delaware dairy herd—high milking cows will eat approximately 43

pounds of corn silage and 10 pounds of alfalfa hay per day. On this diet a satisfactory grain supplement must contain only 18 percent crude protein and can consist of 1,405 pounds shelled corn, 525 pounds soybean oil meal and 70 pounds of a mineral mixture (½ dical and limestone, ¼ trace mineralized salt, including 4 pounds of magnesium oxide).

Some top dairymen prefer to use alfalfa as the only forage especially if it contains both alfalfa haylage and green chop. This is another excellent feeding program. On this ration, high milking cows will eat approximately 24 pounds of alfalfa per day on a dry basis. To provide for their energy needs, they require a grain mixture containing only 9 percent crude protein. This supplement can consist of 1,950 pounds shelled corn and 50 pounds of a mineral mixture (½ dical and ¼ trace mineralized salt, including 2 pounds of magnesium oxide).

The supplements in these three feeding programs get simpler and cheaper as less proteins and buffers are needed and more alfalfa replaces the corn silage. Thus, at current prices the supplement for the all-corn silage

system in the above example costs \$141 a ton, while that under the all-alfalfa system costs \$101, and the mixed system supplement costs about halfway between them.

Does the cheaper supplement make up for a possibly higher cost per cow per day when you replace all-corn silage with all-alfalfa? Or does it even leave you with a net income advantage? It should, when the costs of growing, harvesting and feeding alfalfa are considered.

Obviously, alfalfa cannot replace corn and corn silage as a total source of energy, but it can usually provide our high milking cows with better and cheaper feed.

Growing, harvesting and feeding alfalfa without making the most of its unique advantages doesn't make sense. But if you're going to cash in on the benefits of this crop, it must be harvested in the pre- or early-bloom stages at the latest. That's when protein is the highest.

Just remember, that protein is in the leaves, not the stems. This being the case, baling alfalfa stems after extensive leaf loss due to shattering, rain, excessive dryness and repeat raking doesn't make sense. That's why alfalfa haylage or, even better, alfalfa

green chop are such popular replacements for alfalfa hay.

Pre-bloom alfalfa contains approximately 22 percent crude protein, not counting leaf losses, compared to 14 percent at the full bloom stage. As the crop matures, fiber content increases from 30 percent to 46 percent ADF (acid detergent fiber). Palatability usually decreases with maturity.

Alfalfa alone can support high milk production. Recent Kentucky studies showed cows fed 39 pounds of high quality alfalfa haylage and 10 pounds of a simple energy supplement produced 87 pounds of milk per day for eight weeks.

High quality—young—alfalfa has an economic advantage in all forage feeding systems, but its fiber content becomes more important as less and less is included in the daily cow ration.

More mature alfalfa hay, because of its higher fiber content, may even be important for cows that are on very high grain rations and eat less than half of their daily dry matter in the form of long forages. Finely chopped corn silage is deficient in long forage fiber. Sufficient high fiber alfalfa intake can prevent displaced abomasum in dairy cows.

Alfalfa is also the best and most easily absorbed source of calcium (about 2 percent in the dry matter) for high milking cows. But, for economical or physiological (to prevent milk fever) reasons, growing heifers and dry cows or close-up heifers should not be fed much alfalfa.

As you can see, when properly handled, alfalfa can really improve your milk production net income.

Cash Bonus Available To Eastern Dairy Farmers

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Eastern Milk Producers Dairy Cooperative will start offering a new quality bonus to dairy farmers, effective this month.

Eastern President Earl Forwood, a dairy farmer from Hop Bottom, Pa., said the bonus would amount to five cents per hundred pounds of milk shipped, and could mean an extra \$400 a year in the average member's pocket.

"This is a new bonus available to nearly all of Eastern's 4,000 dairy farmers," said Michael Donovan, General Manager of the Cooperative, which has its headquarters in Syracuse, and other facilities in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York and

Vermont.

"Previously," he added, "the bonuses were available only to members who shipped to certain cheese customers who paid incentives. Now the cooperative, in the wake of a very positive fiscal year, is offering the 5-cent incentive to membership in general."

To qualify for the bonus, farmers must meet higher quality standards for raw milk. Although the quality of member milk is already high, Donovan said, the program is intended to encourage even better results for production reasons.

In the case of cheese manufacturing, he said, higher quality milk will result in greater cheese yields.

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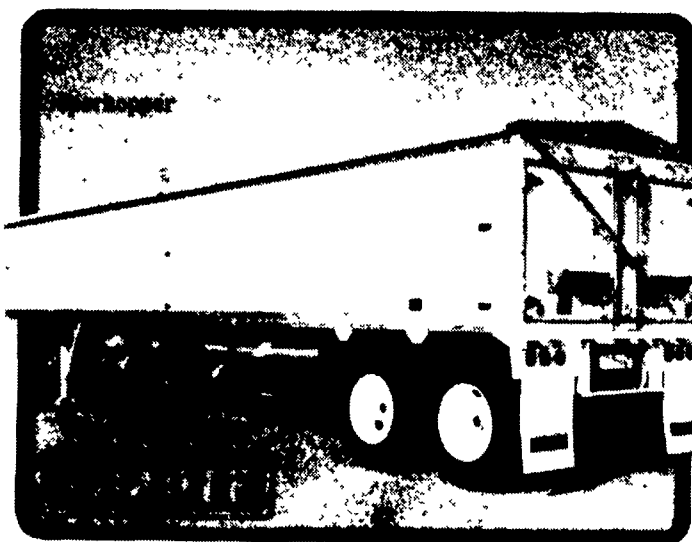
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