

Grass Feeding Can Pave Way For Improved Protein Use

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Editor

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Quality of forage from hay can rival or even outdo conventional corn silage, as proven by tests conducted recently in Lancaster County.

Of 49 samples taken on four farms in 2002, crude protein levels stood at 24.8, with net energy, lactation levels of .724 with a relative feed value of 178.

This was set during a drought year on land that wasn't even irrigated, according to Bruce Kreider, White Oak Mills.

Kreider spoke to more than 80 producers and agri-industry representatives in March at the Lancaster County Family Dairy Day at the Farm and Home Center.

For dairy producers who want to show real results on potential profitability, the key may be getting a greater percentage of cows into a third, fourth, or even fifth lactation, with high-quality forages. "Addressing that addresses your income," said Kreider.

High quality forages, Kreider noted, reduce purchase protein and energy costs. At best, he said, "energy levels (of high quality hay forage) exceed corn silage and triple protein."

With a regular hay forage investment, room can be left to focus investments on brewer grains or protein by-product ingredients to supplement dairy feed.

Kreider asked producers to look at their operations closely to see if high-quality forages are

part of the overall feed investment strategies.

"Where's the secret?" he said. "Where's the thing to make opportunity for change?"

Right now, he noted, "I have no magic that I can pull out of my hat." But optimizing the diet and getting optimal pricing on feedstuffs can go a long way.

What nutritionists have seen, however, are the high amounts of fecal starch in what is wasted on conventional corn diets. There is a tremendous amount of bypass starch in fecal material, which turns into a "tremendous profit drain," Kreider said.

The key: getting the right nutrients off the right crop with the least costly methods. And taking those considerations together with additional cow lactations can help pave the way to profits.

Using technologies such as BST can also help maintain

production curve at higher levels and spread the costs over more hundredweight of milk.

Grazing allows dairy producers to literally "cut out the middleman" by not only having the cows self-harvest the nutrients but provide a way to handle manure.

Kreider provided information from the University of Maryland that pointed out, between 1997-2000, that in a confinement operation, profit per cow stood at about \$477. With grazing, that amount totaled \$580. Confinement feed cost per hundredweight totaled \$4.03, but with grazing, totaled \$3.55.

With growing corn, profits can vary tremendously year to year. With grass, "you'll make money every year," said Kreider. "On the worst years, you'll be

way ahead" (of corn).

However, producers would be crazy not to look at corn silage and corn grain feed to supplement the pasture.

Grazing provides several other advantages, too:

- It's the "gold standard" for cow comfort

- High forage rations reduce potential for acidosis, laminitis

- Vitamin levels are higher in fresh forages

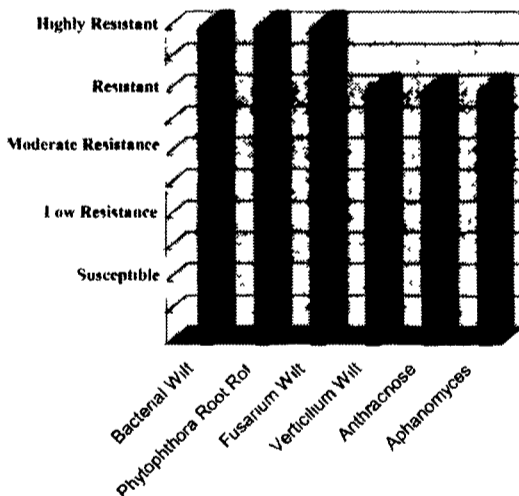
- Cows are comfortable on the grass

- Cows may be in better physical condition on grass.



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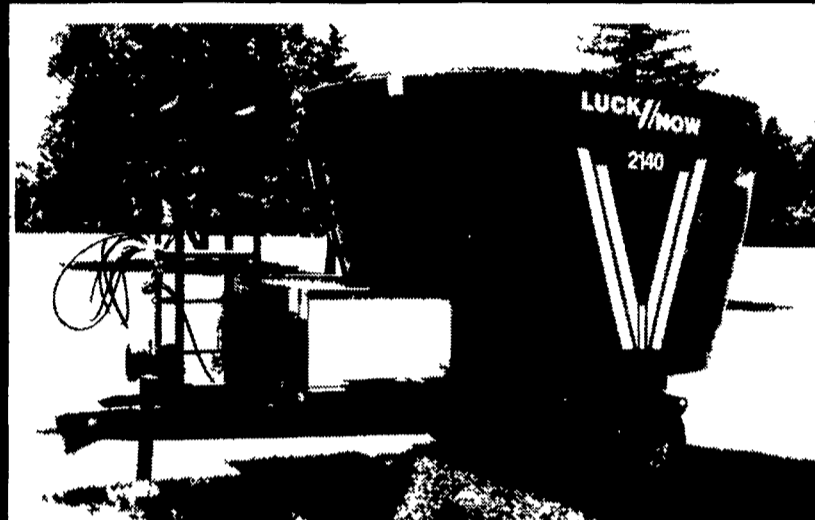
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