

Regional Dairy Newsletter



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June 2010

The 70% Forage Ration – Doable on Your Farm?

Emily Myers, CCE Regional Dairy Specialist

A high forage ration has been viewed by some as the gold standard to which dairymen should strive. When money for grain is tight, feeding a very high forage diet can be tempting as it seems like a cure all; reducing feed costs short term and utilizing on-farm forage. However, many important factors must be carefully considered before pushing forage levels near the 70% or even the 60% mark. For those of you who occasionally cut grain, or consistently feed less grain than your nutritionist calls for, it may be time to think twice about the long term effects this could have on your herd and your pocketbook.



Is 70% possible?

Simply put, yes. It is possible to feed a 70% forage ration. As a matter of fact, it's possible to feed a 100% forage ration, but maintaining milk production, feed efficiency and income over feed cost (IOFC) while doing so is another matter all together. Like many other things in life,

what you put in the cow will have a big impact on what you get out. Feeding the majority of forage as unchopped late maturity first cut hay will probably not result in a cow that averages 80+ lbs.

I often hear the argument made that a farm enjoys having a “low input, low output” type of management system. This frequently means that a high forage diet is fed regardless of

forage quality, forage quality is unknown, bunks may go empty, other management factors may be overlooked due to labor availability and milk production is on the low side. Those that take this route often believe they are equally profitable to a “high input, high output” strategy, but if you do the math, the opposite

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is frequently true. In addition, many farms that are limited by labor, could probably afford to hire a part or full time employee if they made changes that resulted in better feed efficiency and production in their cows. More labor availability has potential to start a cascade of positive effects leading to a tightly run, more efficient farm.

A quick example can drive this point home. Let's compare the same farm feeding two different rations. The first ration is dry hay and a grain mix (at \$250/ton). About 15 lbs of grain is fed and the rest of dry matter intake is supplied by medium quality long hay. The fibrous nature of the forage in this diet will likely limit dry matter intake to around 40 lbs/day, so a 62% forage ration.

The second ration uses the same medium quality hay, a grain mix of

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equal price and good quality corn silage purchased from a neighbor for \$115/ton (dry matter basis). The grain is fed at 22 lbs dry matter, corn silage at 18 pounds of dry matter and hay fills in the rest of the cow's dry matter needs.

Due to the fact that less overall forage is being fed and the quality is increased, maximum dry matter intake is likely to be higher, estimated at 45 lbs, resulting in a 51% forage diet. Table 1 shows that although out of pocket feed cost is higher for the 51% forage diet, the IOFC and feed efficiency are both dramatically better when more grain is fed. Not only is IOFC affected, but body condition of the cows, their ability to get pregnant and stay pregnant and to maintain a good immune system are also on the line.

Table 1. Comparison of two different rations. Milk price of \$14/cwt was used. CPM Dairy version 3.0 was used for DMI and milk predictions.

	Dry Hay and Grain (62% forage)	Hay, Grain and Corn Silage (51% forage)
Estimated DMI	40 lbs	45 lbs
Predicted Milk	54 lbs	70 lbs
Feed Efficiency	1.35	1.56
Ration Cost	\$3.52	\$4.11
IOFC	\$4.04	\$5.69

Considering the above information, feeding a high forage ration is possible, but should not be tried simply in an attempt to lower feed costs short term or without assistance

from a nutritionist. If forage quality is not in the great/excellent range, feed efficiency and likely overall profitability can be reduced by a high forage diet.

But...My Forages Are Like Rocket Fuel!

You have BMR corn silage, you take 4 cuttings of alfalfa-grass haylage, your silos are air tight and packing density is through the roof. If this is the case then it sounds like you might meet some of the criteria that it would take to be able to feed a 70% forage ration. Let's not forget that forage quantity, particle size (can be chopped slightly smaller if a very high forage diet is fed) and consistency are all still critical to pulling off a high forage ration. In a 70% forage ration, if forage dry matter changed only 3% it would result in a dry matter

availability swing of over 3 lbs for the cow (worth about 6 pounds of milk), meaning dry matter needs to be tested on an almost daily basis to avoid potentially empty bunks, dry matter intake issues, slug feeding

or a lot of wasted feed.

It is also important to realize that even though nutrition is critical, it can not make up for other big deficiencies on the farm. Repro, cow comfort, transition and dry cow management, grouping, milk quality etc. need to be up to par in order for great nutrition to really shine.

The Benware Dairy

(See the Hoard's Dairyman September 2009 issue, page 583 for full article)

The Benware Dairy is a 140 cow free stall operation owned by Ira and Emma Benware and operated with their son Loren. They have been feeding over a 70% forage ration for 10+ years and maintain a 25,756 lb rolling herd average, at 3.8% fat, 3.15% protein. Cows are milked 2X, 2/3 of the herd is on BST and the free stall is sand bedded.

Forage quality on the Benware farm is phenomenal, with NDF digestibility (NDFd) of their grass and grass legume mixes running roughly 10-15 percentage points higher than average (their grass haylage NDFd runs 55-64, MML haylage runs 55-60) and corn silage net energy for lactation (NE_L) is .79-.80 Mcal/lb. Corn silage is cut at a height

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of 24 inches and processed, resulting in a feed more similar to a mix of corn silage and high moisture corn than straight corn silage. As of September 2009, 29% of the ration DM was haylage and 43% was corn silage with only 16 pounds of grain being fed. Intakes averaged 54 lbs DM with a 3.5% fat corrected milk:feed efficiency of 1.7.

Loren reports that cows are very healthy, with only a few DA's over the past several

years, no laminitis and minimal ketosis. He attributes the success of their high forage ration in part to allowing the rumen of the cow to stretch slowly over time to accommodate more voluminous feed and the shift in rumen microbes toward efficient fiber fermentation. Forage quality and NDFd are also extremely important and can not be underestimated.

It has been reported that each 1% point increase in NDFd can result in a .5 lb increase in milk production per day, meaning

NDFd is a limiting factor in how much forage you can feed and still maintain high production. Loren recommends cutting grass before it heads out and cutting alfalfa at early bud stage to maximize quality.

This summer when you are considering when to cut your grass or mixed grass/legume fields, keep the Benware Dairy and high forage diets in mind. Without forage quality, high forage diets will not work well on the farm.

Basic Tips for Farm Labor Compliance

Jessica Prosper, Farm Business Management Educator

Whether or not you are new to hiring farm labor, the following is some basic information that will help you comply with the state and federal labor laws.

Farm Work Agreement: A farm work agreement must be completed for each employee and signed by both employer and employee at the time of hiring. A copy of a very general farm work agreement must also be completed and posted on the farm in a central location. In NY the posted agreement is only required to list wages and hours. However, it can also include salary ranges, regular hours, benefit policy, paid holidays, unacceptable behavior etc. Examples of farm work agreements can be found at the New York Farm Bureau

website at www.nyfb.org under Resources.

I-9 Forms: The purpose of the I-9 is to help employers verify that the person applying for the job is eligible to be employed in the United States. This form must be completed every time you hire or re-hire an employee and be kept on file in case of an audit. I-9 forms as well as instructions can be found at www.uscis.gov/i-9.

W-4 Federal Employee Withholding Certificate: This should be completed by the employee and kept on file in order to determine the amount of federal withholding tax that should be withheld from each paycheck. This form can be found at www.irs.gov.

IT-2104 New York State Employee's Withholding Allowance: This should be completed to determine the amount of state income taxes to withhold from each paycheck. This form can be found at www.tax.state.ny.us.

NYS New Hire Report: Information must be provided to NYS Department of Tax and Finance within 20 days of hiring a new employee. This is for child support payment purposes. This information can easily be provided to the State via fax or internet. Information pertaining to new hire reporting can be found at www.tax.state.ny.us/wt/newhire.

Workers Compensation: Farm employers are required to

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carry workers compensation coverage on their employees if total wages paid in the previous year exceeded \$1200. The farmer, spouse, and children under the age of 18 are exempt from workers' compensation coverage. A poster with information about the workers' compensation carrier must be posted in a central location. Generally posters can be obtained from the insurance carrier.

Minimum Wage: If wages

exceeded \$3000 in the previous year, minimum wage standards apply. Currently, both Federal and NYS minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. A copy of both the NY Minimum Wage Order for Farm Workers and the Federal Minimum wage poster must be posted in a central location. These posters can be found at www.labor.state.ny.us (NYS poster) and www.dol.gov (Federal poster).

Unemployment Insurance:
Unemployment insurance

coverage is required when the farm's payroll exceeds \$20,000 per calendar quarter or if there are more than 10 employees in each of 20 weeks. If unemployment insurance is paid a poster must be posted in a central location.

For a complete checklist for agricultural employers, for copies of any of the forms mentioned above, or for more information in general, please contact Jessica at 483-7403 or jlrl15@cornell.edu.

Dairy Price Stabilization on the Horizon - Slow Progress

Emily Myers, CCE Regional Dairy Specialist

This month two new dairy price stabilization plans are coming to light that seem as though they may offer some promise.

The first plan, created by Congressman Jim Costa of California, combines elements of previously proposed plans with some new additions. The Costa plan is currently more defined than the second plan, proposed by the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), which at this point is more of an outline requiring further fleshing out. The following text has been taken directly from the Northeast Dairy Farmers Cooperative April 2010 Newsletter by Bob Gray:

Congressman Costa of California Is Poised to Introduce Dairy Price Stabilization Program Bill

Congressman Jim Costa of California's 20th Congressional District, which includes a good portion of the Central Valley in the Golden State, is set to introduce the Dairy Price Stabilization Program (DPSP) next week. Costa is a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee. Right now he is looking for cosponsors before he drops the bill. Several Northeastern Members of Congress will likely cosponsor the Costa Bill since although in their minds it is "not perfect" it is a start in developing a long-term dairy policy to deal with price volatility.

The DPSP would have a 30 member Board made up of 24 dairy producers and would include representation from other sectors of the dairy industry. The Board would advise the Secretary on DPSP operations.

Here is a quick thumbnail sketch as to how the program would operate:

- The program operates on a facility-by-facility basis and every facility has an allowable production based on the amount of milk produced on that facility the same quarter in the previous year, plus an allowable year-over-year growth in production
- Allowable Milk Marketings;
 - o Initial establishment-based on the highest annual milk marketing level of either years 2007, 2008 or 2009
 - o Future milk marketings-equivalent to the quantity of milk commercially produced in corresponding quarter of the previous calendar year
- Each quarter, the Secretary of Agriculture will announce two numbers:

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- o The allowable year-over-year growth rate that any producer can grow without paying any market access fee.
- o The Market Access Fee that will be paid by expanding dairies for the first year of the higher production.
- The Milk/Feed Ratio is used as a trigger for both the allowable growth rate and the market access fee.
 - o Higher ratios result in larger allowable growth and a lower market access fee
 - o Lower ratios result in lower or negative allowable growth and a higher market access fee

- o Alternative Market Access Fee: a higher fee per-hundredweight on only the additional milk produced beyond a facility's allowable production. (5 times the standard market access fee)
- o Producers may choose which fee they pay based on their own unique dairy needs

- Fees collected from producers that exceed the allowable growth will be distributed as a dividend to the dairies that stayed within their allowable milk production.

NMPF Unveils An Overview of their Dairy Market Stabilization Program

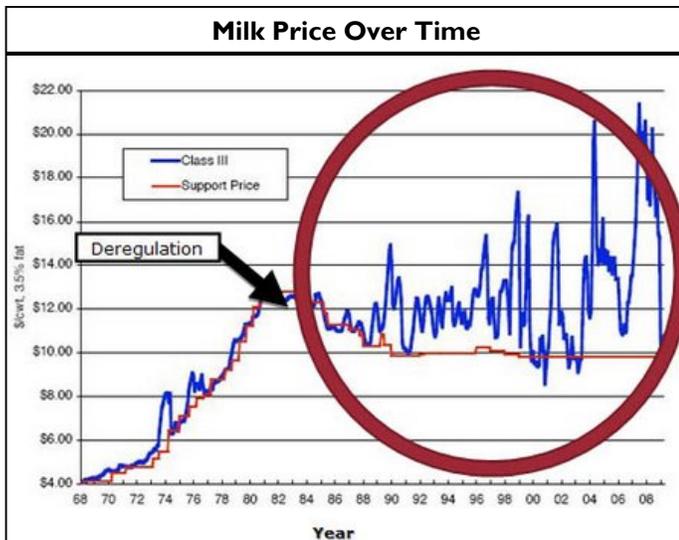
As part of the presentations to USDA's Dairy Industry Advisory Committee, NMPF discussed a number of provisions of a Dairy Market Stabilization Program that they are currently working on. They hope to have the details of this program

- the program are as follows:
1. The program must allow for production growth.
 2. Reducing margin volatility is the main objective.
 3. Government intervention is kept to a minimum.
 4. The program shall not encourage imports or negatively effect exports.

The program embodies the concept of Marginal Milk Pricing which would trigger in when a portion of a milk producer's production is above a certain level. The producers would receive a reduced or zero payment on that portion of the milk produced above their base. More information on how this Marginal Milk Pricing idea works will be forthcoming.

In addition NMPF is proposing a Voluntary CWT Sales Assistance Program. The major purpose of the program would be aimed at increasing exports of U.S. dairy products. The funding for the program would be provided by dairy producers at a level of 1.5 to 3 cents per hundredweight.

Again, more information on this program will be available in the weeks ahead.



Adapted from <http://www.allbreedsblog.com/category/miscellaneous/>

- There are two types of Market Access Fees
 - o Standard Market Access Fee: a lower fee per-hundredweight on all the milk of an expanding facility (approx. \$.03-.50 per-hundredweight)

ready for review and approval by the NMPF Board in June, so many details are still being worked out. The principles of

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- High forage diet
- Cow comfort
- Animal welfare



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BCS is Critical

Emily Myers, CCE Regional Dairy Specialist

Body condition scoring cows is something that all too frequently gets forgotten. Let's take a quick moment to review why it is so important as a management tool.

1. You are in the same barn, with the same cows all day long. It can get very difficult to see changes in the condition of your cows (or yourself for that matter) when you see them all the time. Body condition scoring allows you to repeatedly and consistently compare cows to a set standard using pictures and visual cues if you need them.
2. Body condition loss is a big deal. The body condition of your cows can tell a lot about nutrition, the transition period, the length of lactation, if lameness is present or if there is another issue that needs to be addressed. Ideally a cow should be at a BCS of 3.5-3.75 at freshening, lose no more than .5 BCS in the first 60 days after calving and slowly gain back that .5 BCS during her lactation. In the real world, that is hard to pull off, but a BCS loss of 1 or more during the first 60 days in milk definitely signifies a problem.
3. One body condition score is equivalent to about 150 pounds in a mature cow. If this much is lost in the first 60 DIM, it would be equivalent to a 200 pound man losing roughly a half a pound per day for 60 days. Not a small feat.
4. A dry cow that freshens too thin will not reach the peak milk she would have if she was at an appropriate BCS. This will hurt her whole lactation and potentially subsequent lactations if she doesn't gain weight back.
5. A fresh cow that gets too thin has a lower chance of getting pregnant. Plus, a very thin cow could have a weaker immune system, making her more susceptible to viruses and bacteria.
6. A new theory suggests that lame cows don't necessarily get thin, but the opposite may be true; thin cows become lame. This is based on the idea that the fat pad within the foot becomes depleted and no longer provides adequate cushioning.
7. Your cows are on pasture and they are starting to look "thin". If you did condition scoring every month you'd know just how much they lost and take appropriate action to prevent a real issue down the road; like drying off and then calving in at a BCS of 2.5 or lower.
8. Thin cows are a problem, but so are fat cows. Excessive condition is money on the table. Not only are fat cows more likely to have issues at calving, you are paying to sustain flesh that doesn't need to be there.

How To: If you aren't familiar with body condition scoring ask your veterinarian, nutritionist or extension agent how to go about it. It's really quite simple once you get the hang of it. We would be happy to provide you with visual materials to get started and strategies to keep your scoring consistent. Try following 5 or 10 of your cows through transition and see how much they lose, or BCS a group of cows that are sorted based on DIM and compare to other groups that are at different DIM.

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ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'S Crop Soil News by Tom Kilcer

<http://www.advancedagsys.com/>

Alert! The season (haycrop) is progressing faster than any year of the previous 10 and far ahead of normal. There is more money in making hay before

As of 4/27/10 we are 9 days ahead of the earliest previous warm year. As of May 6, after the hot weekend, we will be 2 weeks ahead of where we normally are on May 21. The big concern is that the fields which are all grass, or more than half grass, will slip by in quality before most farmers

When choosing between planting corn and harvesting haycrop, you are further ahead harvesting hay crop. Corn will NOT decrease in quality with the slight delay in planting, especially this early year. It only affects yield in a small percentage. Each day delay has a huge impact on the milk

profitability in the Northeast dairy industry, you need to be feeding more than 60% forage in your diet. High forage diets can put the profitability back into the milk check, IF the forage is QUALITY forage.

When Alfalfa near a Grass field is 13 inches tall	Start to Cut Your Pure Grass Stands
When Alfalfa in Mixed 50% Alfalfa 50% Grass Stands is 23 inches tall	Cut Your Mixed Stands
When Alfalfa is 30 inches tall in > 80% Alfalfa	Cut Your Mostly Alfalfa Stands

realize they are ready. Yes, this is insanely early, but that is the weather—similar to last year but warmer. Depending on temperature, alfalfa will change from 0.5 to 1 NDFd/day. Grass is faster. Data from Dr. Larry Chase at Cornell Department of Animal Science, showed that 1 unit change of NDFd = .37 lbs DMI and .55 lbs of 4% milk/cow/day. As your forage feeding levels increase this plays an increasingly important role. If you are 10 days late, for 200 cows fed 1st cut for ½ the lactation, and the forage makes up 25% of the diet with \$14/cwt milk, you are looking at \$5,600 impact.

producing ability of your haycrop forage.

YOUR INDIVIDUAL FIELDS SHOULD DETERMINE WHEN YOU SHOULD START HARVEST, using your alfalfa as a predictor. This simply involves using a ruler and the table above.

With low milk prices, it is absolutely critical that you have a profitable base of sufficient quantities of high quality forage. For long term

YOU decide what quality forage you can feed by WHEN you START and FINISH your haylage harvest.

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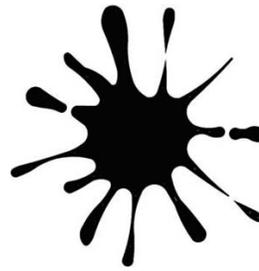
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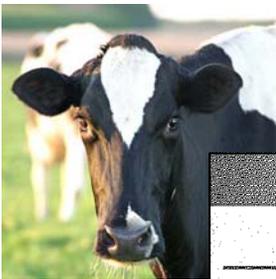
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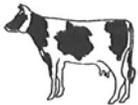
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