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Odds and Sods

Poor Forage & Beef Gains – Sean Firth mentioned that our recent March Feeder Sale of 216 head averaged 85 lbs/head less than the rolling six year average. This likely reflects the general poor quality of 2006 forages and the very high cost of corn and barley. Many farmers have been commenting on poor cow condition and lower milk available to new beef calves in the past few months. The pasture season can't come early enough this year, but try to wait for 4 – 6 inches of growth (10 – 15 cm) before turnout or pastures won't perform as well.

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CropLinks

information on forages, corn and cereals

This issue of CropLinks talks about some upcoming producer meetings that are planned for the next couple of weeks, along with some fertilizer considerations for various crops (see insert), good packing practices for bunker silos, N timings for winter wheat and a big Maritime Forage Variety Test that's being planned for this spring. With daylight to 8pm and some nice 10-15C days starting to happen, have a read through CropLinks and let's get ready to rumble.

Get a good pack and reduce spoilage

Bunker silos have several advantages over upright silos however excessive spoilage or dry matter loss can be a problem. Getting the crop stored at a high enough density in the silo is an important factor that can minimize dry matter loss and spoilage during fermentation and feed out. The goal is to compact the silage to a density of at least 17 lbs of dry matter per cubic foot for corn silage and at least 15 lbs for haylage. Simply put the higher the density the lower the dry matter loss and the more stable the feed is at feed out.

A recent study at the Wisconsin determined the major factors affecting the density of a grass or legume crop stored in bunker silo was packing pressure, moisture content, and chop length, for corn silage it was packing pressure, layer thickness and kernel processing. Packing pressure is a function of silage depth, tractor weight, and time packing per tonne.

The following options are suggested for improving compaction during filling:

- Keep harvester knives sharp and chop haylage at 3/8 inch theoretical cut and corn silage at 1/4 inch cut. This should provide enough effective fiber to prevent fat test depression and yet allow effective packing.
- Fill the silo from the back to the front using a 1:3 or 1:4 slope often referred to as the progressive wedge technique.
- Decrease packing layer thickness from 12 inches to 6 inches
- Consider adding weight to the tractor by adding fluid to the tires, adding front end weights, adding steel wheel weights, or adding dual wheels with fluid and or wheel weights. Increasing tractor weight will increase silage packing density.
- Add an additional packing tractor especially as the pile is nearing completion. Use a heavier rather than lighter second tractor so as not to reduce the average tractor weight.

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Spoilage (continued)

- Increase packing time especially during the final two feet. As a general rule the amount of packing time (in minutes) required per ton of wet silage is equal to 18 divided by the weight of the tractor. For example if the tractor weighs 10 tons then the packing time required would be 1.8 minutes per ton of wet silage.

Crop and Critter Meetings to Attend

There are some informative grower meetings planned in late March and early April which cover improved forage management for beef & dairy, better dairy feeding efficiency plus corn and cereal production tips.

Improving Forage and Feeding Efficiency on Your Dairy Farm

March 27th – Coldbrook, Wandlyn Inn (10 am – 3 pm)

March 28th – Port Hawkesbury, Civic Centre (10 am – 3 pm)

March 28th – Scotsburn, Fire Hall (7:30 pm – 10 pm)

March 29th – Shubenacadie, St. Briget's Catholic Church Hall (10 am – 3 pm)

The key speaker for this session is Virginia Ishler, the Dairy Herd Manager for Penn State University. Penn State is one of the leading dairy feeding researchers in the U.S. Besides her work at Penn State, Virginia & her husband are in partnership with his parents, operating a custom heifer raising business and selling total mixed rations to local dairy producers. Ms. Ishler's talks are on fine tuning silage based rations for dairy cows and considerations in feeding calves and heifers. Other speakers on this program are Martine de Graaff (SCIANS) discussing pasture improvement projects, Dr. Glen Sampson (NSAC) with a new grassland & pasture herbicide, plus Bill Thomas and Jack vanRoestel (AgraPoint) handling topics such as bunker silo packing techniques, "Forage Quality – More Important than Ever", value of our Maritime corn & forage testing program and is Bt corn worth the tech fee? This is a joint program put on by the Soil & Crop Improvement Association of Nova Scotia (SCIANS) and AgraPoint. For the day meetings there is a \$ 10 registration fee to pay for lunch.

Please Note that on March 28th in Truro there is also a full day meeting organized by Clarence Farm Services Ltd. titled "Milk to the Max! 2007". This meeting features Dr. Mike Hutjens, Dr. Ken Osborne and Joel Cormier. Unfortunately neither Clarence's or SCIANS were aware of the scheduling conflict when these meetings were being organized. Both the March 28th Clarence's dairy meeting and our March 29th forage and dairy feeding session in Shubenacadie should be high quality information exchanges and dairy farmers in Central Nova are encouraged to attend both.

Annapolis County Soil & Crop Meeting "Let's Get Ready for Cropping"

This meeting starts with lunch at 12:30pm (\$10 charge) and follows with presentations from Bill Thomas, Sean Firth, and Jack vanRoestel (AgraPoint) on N-P-K fertility considerations for grass forage – barley – wheat – soybeans – corn, improving forages for beef, the sleighfoot manure technology project, new corn herbicides, etc. Both the Dairy Club and this Soil & Crop meeting are open to producers and agricultural service reps in the province.

Annapolis Dairy Management Club Barn Meeting at Trifarm Holsteins

April 3rd – David and Pamela Bent's Farm, North Middleton (10 am – 12 noon)

This morning session will have discussion led by Dave, Daniel Scothorn (independent dairy nutritionist), Bill Thomas and Jack vanRoestel (AgraPoint) on 1st cut forage harvest timings, feeding for high milk production, bunker silo packing density targets, wide swath wilting, producing low K dry cow hay, etc. We'll start sharp at 10 am with hot coffee and you can join us for lunch (\$10 cost) at the Agricultural office in Lawrencetown which is part of the Soil and Crop Meeting that afternoon. Bring your boots it will be muddy around the farmyard in early April. A big "thank you" to Amy Rose for making the lunch arrangements.

Odds and Sods (continued)

Nitrogen for Winter Wheat – In checking several wheat fields on March 15 – 16th, there seems to be good winter survival to date (hopefully we won't get the heave and thaw conditions in the next 2 – 3 weeks to cause root system damage). There is some leaf tip burn showing in many fields from recent wind chill conditions; however this doesn't hurt the crop.

Many growers will try to put the 1st N application on in late March with a carrying frost. For the 1st N, I like to see about 35 N supplied from 80 kg/ha of 46-0-0 (or 70 lbs/ac). If the 1st N is applied in late March, the 2nd N would go the first week of May and could be in the form of urea again, unless the weather is hot and windy enough that serious ammonia losses could occur (in this case use 34-0-0 instead). The 2nd N application rate could be around 50-60 N, but this would be reduced if manure went on at seeding or there was a legume N credit.

New Maritime Forage Variety Test – Bill and I have done a fair amount of promo work on a new forage variety test that should include 3 Nova Scotia sites. Through a re-vamped testing approach there appears to be strong interest from 7-8 forage companies in having alfalfa, red clover, timothy, brome-orchard-reed canary grass variety trials planted this May. We'll have a much stronger and more current forage variety recommended list for you in a few years from this effort.