

Straw may be the only forage option for some livestock farmers!

Over the past few years we have seen straw used to extend silage stocks and a protein enhanced molasses blend such as Regumix has played a role in this. Trial work carried out at the South West Dairy Development Centre, Kingshay showed that 7.5kgs of grass silage could be replaced by 1.5kg of Straw and 1.5kgs of Regumix in a dairy ration. However this year we have seen such extremely dry weather that there are many livestock farmers who have no silage or grazing available and the only option is to utilise straw as the only source of forage. This is especially acute with many suckler herds being particularly short of forage

Straw is considered an unpalatable, indigestible and low protein feedstuff; however, there are a significant number of livestock farmers who have little else in terms of forage to feed and have to make the best of this challenging situation. On a positive note, straw is an excellent base for ruminant diets when silage is unavailable. It is an excellent source of long fibre and provides the rumen mat with a “scratch factor”. There are several ways of improving both animal intakes and their utilisation of straw, the most effective way is to mix with a molasses based mid/high protein liquid feed.

In order to maximise the nutritional value of straw it is important to promote rumen fermentation. As a result, this will increase the rate of microbial growth within the rumen allowing the animal to make full use of the digestible fraction of straw.

Typical feeding guidelines for suckler cows

	Energy	DMI
Dry/Pre Calving	90	10.3
1st 60 days	135	13.5
Mid Lactation	155	16.9
Late Lactation	120	13.7
Maintenance	77	8.8



Typically, these requirements would be met using grazing or grass silage-based diets. However, with the extreme lack of forage straw is often the only source of forage available.

Example straw based rations

	Straw	Regumix	Regupro 38	Barley	Blend*
Dry/Pre-Calving	7		2		3.5
1st 60 days	9	2			6
Mid Lactation	10	2.5			7
Late Lactation	9	2			5
Maintenance	7	2.5		2.2	0

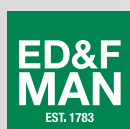
*Blend 13MJ ME/ 15%CP

A combination of good quality straw, a high performance protein enhanced molasses based liquid feed from ED&F Man plus some cereals or a bought in blend can be used to create a well balanced diet for suckler cows and help livestock farmers work through the forage shortage.

Tips for success

- Use good quality clean straw
- Ideally chop the straw and create a mixed ration with the dry feed and ED&F Man Liquid feed.
- Ensure good access to fresh clean water.
- Ensure a **good source of minerals** are available as straw is naturally low in key minerals.
- Regularly body condition score animals to ensure there is no unexpected loss of condition.





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