



Take a fresh look at molasses

Molasses and molasses blends could play a significant role in maintaining dairy margins and eking out feed and forage supplies this summer.

TEXT PHIL EADES

Soya and rape prices have risen significantly, and these commodity price movements will impact on-farm feed prices and margins, as dairy businesses move out of winter fixed-price contracts. So says ED&F Man's technical support manager Georgina Chapman, who is urging producers to look where cost savings can be made without compromising cow rations. "Whatever changes are made, it is crucial to ensure the diet contains the optimum balance of rumen degradable and bypass protein sources to meet planned production levels while reducing protein costs.

"One cost-effective option is to replace a proportion of rape and soya in the diet with a protein-enriched molasses, which can be an excellent source of rumen degradable protein and fermentable energy," she adds. Trials at University of Reading's Centre for Dairy Research saw 1.6kg of a 50:50 rape and soya blend in a milking cow diet replaced with 2kg of Regumaize 44 – a urea-enhanced molasses blend. This reduced the

inclusion of rape: soya by 40%, but total dry matter fed remained the same. And the diets had the same energy and protein contents.

"The change in the diets had no impact on milk yield and butterfat, but milk protein was increased from 3.62% to 3.71%, possibly due to the extra readily fermentable energy in the Regumaize," says Ms Chapman.

Protein balance

"At today's prices, the diet including Regumaize would cost around 16p per cow per day less – that's around £1,000 per month for a 200-cow herd. For producers on a constituent-based contract, the additional milk protein would also help support milk prices.

"We would never advocate a total switch from conventional protein to a high-protein molasses blend, as this would compromise the protein balance in the diet," she stresses. "But a partial replacement could go quite a way to reducing the impact of rising prices."

Ms Chapman suggests that where a dairy business has good cover of protein straights purchased at lower prices, a urea-enhanced molasses blend could be successfully included to eke out those stocks, delaying the time when more expensive supplies need to be purchased.

"Alternatively, if you are about to order more soya and rape, revising the ration to include some Regumaize will reduce the impact of higher feed prices on margins." Before making any change, it is vital to check the ration to determine the most effective product choice and

Georgina Chapman:
"Partial replacement could reduce the impact of rising prices"



replacement rate. "And to ensure the protein sources are balanced and cows produce to their potential." Looking towards grazing, the focus must be on driving production from grazed grass, allowing intakes to be maximised. And forage stocks also need to be conserved for the coming winter. No-one can predict how the season will unfold, or the pattern and levels of grass growth. For example, the cold and wet spring in 2020 was followed by an exceptionally hot and dry period, which led to reduced grass growth throughout the summer.

Forage stocks

"This has implications for the supply of grazed grass and the level of buffer feeding required, which can have a knock-on effect on winter forage stocks if grass silage is a principal component of the buffer feed," says Ms Chapman. "If more silage is fed as a buffer then less will be available for the winter. And if grass growth rates are reduced then grass silage yields will be lower, which can make the challenge for next winter even greater."

Producers must strike a balance between adequate buffer feeding, to maintain summer production, and the need to preserve sufficient forage, to help reduce winter-purchased feed demands. The latest research carried out by ED&F Man, at the Agri-EPI South West Dairy Development Centre, shows that including a proportion of straw and a molasses-based liquid feed in the buffer feed can allow production to be maintained, while preserving valuable silage stocks.

Grass silage in the buffer feed was reduced from 25.5kg per day to 18kg and replaced by 1.5kg of wheat straw and 1.5kg of Regumix – a palatable molasses-based liquid feed. The total daily dry matter intake was unchanged. Performance was then compared with cows on the original buffer feed and this was also unchanged," adds Ms Chapman.

During a six-week period, there was no difference in yield between cows fed the initial buffer and those where straw and molasses was included. But there was a saving of 7.5kg of silage per day. Assuming 200 cows were fed the new buffer, the total silage saved during the six-week period would have been more than 60 tonnes, saving more for winter feeding. |



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