

KLASSIK KNOWLEDGE

Nutrition; the missing link to improved margins, better animal health and reduced carbon footprints.

Now may be the opportunity that UK farmers have been waiting for to change the way they manage their cows and improve margins, given many systems of milk production in the UK are simply not profitable and failing to respond to the many problems and issues that the dairy industry is facing. Continuing low prices for milk, CAP reforms and increasing energy costs are all impacting directly on profit margins even if we can't seriously affect them. But poor animal health and performance and the public's growing concerns over animal welfare and the environment are equally important to the long term viability of UK dairying and these are something over which we have control.

Following extensive on-farm testing and appropriate scientific investigation, Keenan have launched a new nutritional management system for dairy cows which brings major gains and is simple to implement. It can significantly increase overall margins, markedly improve animal health and reduce the carbon footprint for milk production, provided it is fully implemented.

The low energy:high fibre strategy for dairy cows has conclusively been shown to reduce animal health issues at calving and better prepare the cow for the oncoming lactation as well as improving her chances of getting back in calf. Providing lactation rations which aim to optimise rumen health through the inclusion of adequate amounts of structural fibre then brings further benefits through improved feed utilisation. Feed conversion efficiency (FCE) is a measure of the litres of milk (of standard composition) produced for each kg feed DM consumed and gains in excess of 0.1kg/kg after 12 months increasing to over 0.25kg/kg after 3 years simply mean more milk for the same amount of feed. With an annual intake of over 5 tonnes of feed DM per year, this could take a 6000 litre cow to almost 7500 litres after 3 years at no extra feed cost with no increase in health issues, often thought to associated with increased levels of milk production. Economic analysis of this data has shown that a modest improvement in FCE of 0.1kg/kg, which almost all herds are capable of achieving within 12 months, adds an extra 36p/cow/day to the margin, that's over £100 per cow per year to which there is an additional £60/cow/year through reduced calving issues. That's worth at least an extra 2.2p per litre for every litre sold.

But there is another important outcome of the new Keenan System for efficient milk production. Cows produce methane and levels in the atmosphere are increasing year on year, adding to concerns over global warming. It has been estimated that total methane emissions from agriculture account for more than half (55%) of agriculture's total gaseous emissions. That suggests its time for action. Based on extensive research which measured methane production by dairy cows it is predicted that full adoption of the Keenan system would reduce methane outputs by at least 10% in UK top herds, by as much as 15% on average herds and possibly over 20% on lower performing herds.

This is a single and simple nutritional strategy which improves animal health, performance and margin and reduces environmental emissions. It brings major gains for all; for the producers, the processors and the consumers of dairy products. This new nutritional management approach to the way cows should be fed, with full adoption of the new Keenan system, offers a well tried and proven starting point for change.

For Further Information:
Tel: +44 (0)247 669 8200
web: www.rumans.info

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