

September Article Orkney Farmer

Now that the shows have been and gone for another year the focus turns to those late cut silages and the onset of harvest. This year we are looking at being probably being 3 weeks later than usual which brings its own pressures not just on getting the Barley of but also getting the straw which for many is almost as valuable as the grain.

If this wasn't bad enough we hear that the harvest in America is poor and that the quality if harvest further south on the mainland is not that clever either. On the back of this we are seeing Straights rocket in price and so we know feed will follow. What can we do to help ourselves?

Here are some ways to help you sustain productivity and yet keep a lid on the costs.

- You must get your silage analysed for feed value so that you have some idea what you are feeding and what you can achieve for what you have grown.
- You now need to set some targets probably based on what your cattle have achieved in previous years.
- With this information you can now workout a ration to get the daily live weight gain you are looking for.
- This will also give you the information for what you have to buy in to balance the diet and how much you need in total.
- When taking your silage sample take a little bit extra and get the mineral profile as well. This will enable you to target any know imbalances or short falls you may have.

This year's silages which i have sampled are looking very good with higher than usual energy's and proteins about normal. What is unusual this year is every sample has had a good lactic acid fermentation which i have only seen once before on Orkney. As a result there is some lovely stable silage with pHs of 3.8 to 4.2.

As for Minerals the profiles have altered again this year with Higher Molybdenum coming from a higher than usual water table and so being taken up more readily by the grass. I am also finding higher levels of other antagonists to Copper. This may have already had some effect on growth and live weight gain at grass but will also have had an effect on some animals being later to come to the bull. The major elements have little change but with Phosphorus typically on the low side this is one to watch and in some cases possible sulphur will need to be taken into consideration. With the trace elements we have the usual lows and the higher levels of some of the antagonists i mentioned earlier but please remember if you are concerned it is worth looking into it before the winter sets in. It is just as easy to make to your own mineral premix as it is to buy the same as usual and live to regret it come calving time when it is too late.

Mycotoxins seem to be the new buzz word that everyone and his dog seems to be talking about them. How and why have they just suddenly appeared and what are they. For those of you who have not be effected by them what do they do?

- Mycotoxins have been on Orkney for years and were only really first identified as little as five years ago.
- More likely to be found on second cut silage and straw.
- Mycotoxin is the name given to the waste product from moulds, found on plant but not visible to the naked eye. They are not a living organism.
- There are many different types but most common in Orkney are two Deoxynivalenol (don) and Zearalenone (zon) and these affect your stock in different ways.
- If you have milking dairy cows the signs are easier to spot, with a sudden drop in milk being the most obvious, or cows not achieving expected milk yield. Most commonly these symptoms effect newly calved cows more aggressively resulting in very loose dung and a rapid loss in weight. These same symptoms will affect beef cows mainly causing a mixture of calving problems including still born calves and a whole variety of other problems all connected with the animal's immune system which will show themselves in many different forms.

In conclusion the best way to limit the effect of increased costs and poor production is "Attention to Detail "and to be prepared before the event. If you would like to know more or need help in anyway please contact Birsay Farmers and next time i am on the Islands i can visit.