

PROTEIN, PROTEIN, PROTEIN

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Protein in autumn grass:

At the time of writing (November 1st) quite a number of cows are being brought inside. If you have been relying on a fair amount of autumn grazing, there is a good chance milk will drop when cows go onto full winter rations. This is because you are taking away a high rumen degradable protein source (RDP), which drives the milk yield. Autumn grass is rarely high enough in dry matter to sustain the energy needs of early lactation, high yielding cows. Allowing them to milk off high protein, wet grass results in thin cows. They will tell you it was wrong in January and February with low milk proteins and a high failure to conceive rate. I believe this could be a common problem as autumn grazing has been used to eke out tight forage supplies.



Digestible undegradable protein (DUP):

Various companies are promoting their own brand of this type of protein. This is the protein that is not degraded in the rumen but is used in the hindgut and a shortage can be a limiting factor for high yielding cows. Protected Soya is a typical example of this type of feed. All the different suppliers claim to have the best product because theirs is higher in DUP or amino acids. Some rations will be enhanced by the inclusion of this type of protein.

But what I find disturbing is how, in certain cases, they are being sold. Several dairy farmers have reported that the feed salesman has pitched the product to them as a milk yield improver, which is correct as DUP can increase milk yield. Extra energy is needed to support this increase, which usually comes from an improvement in forage intakes. No questions were asked about adequate forage stocks in a year of tight supplies. Including extra energy wasn't mentioned.

Also, the cows were not inspected. If cows are thin - which many are if buffer feeding has been sparing during the summer - then feeding high DUP supplements is the last thing they need. Stimulating higher yields without adequate energy inputs is a recipe for disaster.

Unfortunately, achieving a sale seems more important than good nutrition.

Protein levels in computer rations:

I have to have another rant about this. I have a diet faxed to me by a Devon farmer that was prepared by a feed rep. This is a Holstein/Friesian herd and the ration was prepared on the farm for a 35-litre cow.

There are three areas I disagree with:

1. A 600kg cow was used.
2. Weight loss/day was 0.5kg.
3. The total protein in the diet came out as 19.6%.

Let's start with the cow at 600kg. The cows were not inspected to determine their weight. I weigh band several hundred cows a year with the DHHPS blood profiling service and I never find Holstein/Friesian herds with an average weight of 600kgs. More energy is needed for a higher weight - about 5 megajoules for each 50kg, so we are short of energy here.

Then there is the weight loss. I know cows lose weight in early lactation, but programming in any weight loss makes it worse. This 0.5kg is worth about 13 megajoules. Another energy shortage.

The third and final moan is the 19.6% protein in the total diet. It may make them milk but it will strip weight severely.

All in all we have underfed by about 18 megajoules, equivalent to about 1.5kgs of concentrates AND jacked up the protein to stimulate milk yield.

When these cows fail to conceive, the same salesman will probably push a copper or phosphorous or vitamin/trace element potion, thereby getting it wrong twice.

He's made margin twice so he's all right. Who says two wrongs don't make a right!