

# Technical Update – Fertiliser Strategy

Information correct as at 10:00am on 25.03.2022



- Home grown forage is still going to be cheaper than purchased feeds
- Target high quality to put the base in rations and give cows the opportunity to milk
- Treat forage crops for what they are- highly valuable commodities and not “just grass”
- Make best use of slurry and organic manure
- If you are going to reduce fertiliser, be strategic in how you do it

Fertiliser prices have experienced even more significant rises than most other commodities and have really come under the spotlight. “Should I continue with the usual application rates” is the question frequently being asked. The answer is generally always going to be yes. It will pay to be more strategic with fertiliser, targeting newer leys particularly in early season when we will get the best response to N applications, but compromising yield or quality is going to make next winter more difficult.

Home grown forage, whether grazed or as silage, is still going to be the cheapest form of feed even accounting for higher fertiliser and contracting costs. We have seen all too clearly this winter the implications of poor quality, high fibre silages and their impact on milk production. With little respite on the horizon for feed prices the prospect of heading into next winter with either a shortage of forage, or a clamp of low-quality material which will hamper dry matter intakes is not a good one.

At this week’s prices the cost to fully fertilise an acre for a 4 cut+ regime which will deliver 5.5 tonnes of dry matter/acre is around £570. These costs can be mitigated by making best use of slurry across the season which will reduce the purchased costs to £275. Cutting later and dropping to a 3 cut system would potentially save £75/acre in fertiliser and £55-£60 in contractors charges, but with a yield penalty of 1 tonne dry matter/acre and significantly less energy and protein.

The higher yield and better quality achieved with the extra cut will produce over 30% more energy and 40% more protein.

To appreciate the full value of forage we need to look at it relative to purchased feeds and the tables below shows that even though the costs of producing forage have increased significantly since earlier in the year, the increase in feed costs has more than kept pace and it is still worth pursuing quality forage.

The table below left show current prices for wheat and rape, and forages based on today’s fertiliser and contractor’s costs. The one on the right shows the situation in February when Nitrogen was £670/t and purchased feeds were cheaper. The higher Value for Money percentage shows the increased benefit of the crops.

Feeds	£ Actual	VFM %
<b>Rolled Wheat</b>	<b>£320</b>	<b>&gt;100% = good</b>
<b>Rapeseed Meal</b>	<b>£425</b>	
Forage - Grazed grass	£17	319%
Forage - Grass silage 3 cut	£60	157%
Forage- Grass silage 4 cut	£66	182%
Forage-Wholecrop W wheat	£59	200%
Forage-Wholecrop S barley	£62	190%
Forage -Maize	£38	251%
Forage- Maize (plastic)	£47	193%

Feeds	£ Actual	VFM %
<b>Rolled Wheat</b>	<b>£225</b>	<b>&gt;100% = good</b>
<b>Rapeseed Meal</b>	<b>£335</b>	
Forage - Grazed grass	£16	247%
Forage - Grass silage 3 cut	£49	139%
Forage- Grass silage 4 cut	£54	161%
Forage-Wholecrop W wheat	£60	138%
Forage-Wholecrop S barley	£52	160%
Forage -Maize	£36	183%
Forage- Maize (plastic)	£45	139%

The figures are based on purchased fertiliser requirements and assume that organic manure has been used up to the NVZ limits for each crop.

For further discussion or to help with any questions that you may have, please contact Consultant Support on [consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com](mailto:consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com) or 01902 851007 / 07542 403225

