



Forage Shortage Intervention Tools

Many farms in the Lake Plains and Finger Lakes Regions in New York are anticipating diminished forage supply for the feeding season we are about to enter. Drought conditions have challenged our production systems in 2016.

These are the cards we have been dealt by Mother Nature. So if I were playing poker, I would be looking at my hand to determine what cards to look for in the draw to enhance my position. Fortunately, in the dairy business we have a little more control over the alternatives we can look at for strengthening our forage position over the coming months. Here is a quick look at some tools one might consider for

- **Increasing Fall Fields,**
- **Getting Some Early Forage in 2017 to Rebuild Inventories,**
- **Stretching Existing Forage Supplies to Last the Season, and**
- **Preventing Costly Mistakes**

Increasing Fall Yields

- **If we start to rebound from the drought** with significant rain, apply 50 pounds of actual Nitrogen to grass hay fields to increase fall hay yield. Expect a return on this within 30 days. Best time to apply is just before a rain.
- Alfalfa – only take a late cutting from third year or older stands. If you must cut younger stands, then be sure you allow a minimum of 42 days before anticipated killing frost. Apply Potassium this fall to soil test recommendations for best winter stand survivability.

Getting Some Early Forage in 2017 to Rebuild Inventories

- Plant a winter small grain cover crop (rye, wheat or triticale) soon after corn silage harvest to reap 2 to 4 tons of early season forage in 2017 and still be able to plant your planned crop.
- Consider spring pasturing of heifers

Stretching Existing Forage Supplies to Last the Season

- Identify forage supplies by forage quality to enable you to allocate forages to meet group needs
- Add low quality hay or straw for chewing fiber into lower forage diets
- Inventory forage supply in field and again once it's in storage to adjust feeding levels, make culling decisions or source additional feed as early as possible
- Cover immediately after packing, consider oxygen barrier plastic such as SiloStop or double layer plastic.
- Secure covers to limit spoilage losses
- Keep stocking density in check to provide a more comfortable environment and increase output per cow
- Cull low profit cows (high somatic cell, problem breeders, chronic lameness or low production) at the earliest opportunity
- Improve reproductive performance to prevent cows open past 100 days in milk which cost you \$3 to \$5 per day open after 100 days
- Get heifers bred as early as possible and tighten up conception window
- Consider a heifer raiser who supplies forage for bred heifers
- Limit feed intake of older bred heifers
- Cull respiratory compromised heifers as early as possible. These girls never make great cows.
- If your herd size is static, raise only the heifers with the best potential

Preventing Costly Mistakes

- Check dry matters often (at least weekly) to verify you are feeding the formulated ration
- Sample and test forages often enough to be sure you know what you are feeding
- Manage bunk faces and ag bag feed out to minimize waste and spoilage
- Keep feed storage areas free of debris and organic matter that will attract varmints that can steal or spoil your supply
- Keep Phosphorous levels close to NRC requirements to keep expensive protein purchases in check
- Listen to your nutritionist and keep amino acids, especially Lysine and Methionine, balanced to promote production of milk and milk components. This can be achieved by feeding multiple protein sources or adding protected amino acids. The return on the dollars invested here is strong.
- Price standing corn based on current market prices for energy and protein feeds
- Base decisions and communications with lenders and others using cash flow and, or partial budgeting rather than your instincts