

## Winter feed costs – what are the options?

# Beat the feed-price rise

Feed prices are on the up again so, with winter fast approaching, what options are there for lower-cost but top quality alternatives? We spoke to some of the UK's leading nutritionists and feed specialists for some timely advice.

text **Rachael Porter**

**W**inter feed stocks are already cause for concern for some dairy producers. Even those with plenty of forage in the clamp will be consulting their calculators and nutritional adviser in equal measure to find the best value complementary feeds – both in terms of price and quality.

“More than ever, due to high feed prices, the key this winter will be to plan carefully and take a balanced view to see you through the winter,” says NWF Agriculture’s Mike Phillips. “We’re urging our customers to make sure they have their forage analysed and to purchase feeds that complement, rather substitute, forage in the diet.

“We’re also reminding them to pay close attention to feed allocation and make sure that what feed they do have is fed to the right cows. Avoid over feeding ‘bottom end’ cows as this will be uneconomic and waste precious feed stocks.”

Kite Consulting’s national nutritionist Tim Davies agrees: “Look closely at allocation, particularly if you feed the milking herd as one group. Depending on milk yields, it could pay to split the herd into high and low yielders and feed accordingly. Both in- and out-of-parlour feeders can be particularly useful in this respect.”

Keenan’s Mark Voss urges producers to look at forage stocks differently. “One of the first things to do is to assess is how much feed you actually need.

“Then calculate your herd’s feed conversion efficiency, before you do anything else, to see the effective ‘miles per gallon’ your ration is producing,” he says.

“A 10% improvement in feed efficiency here is often possible, even over a short period, and this will result in 10% less feed required for a similar output. Now that has to be better than paying extra for expensive feed this winter.”

### Feed efficiency

Increasing efficiency is paramount for many producers as prices and overheads rise and look set to remain high. And there are measures that producers can take to improve feed efficiency while maximising output, according to Alltech’s Bob Kendal.

“Ensuring that cattle are housed comfortably to avoid stress and providing clean drinking water at all times are obvious steps that every producer should take,” he says.

“But to really optimise production, producers could introduce a supplement to enrich the performance of the feed

such as Yea-Sacc, a live yeast culture. “This product can help to maximise feed efficiency. It works by stabilising the pH and increasing the number and activity of bacteria in the rumen,” says Mr Kendal.

### Impressive results

It’s been proven to work as well: the company has conducted a number of university studies across Europe that yielded some impressive results.

In one study, for example, dairy feed conversion efficiency increased by 6% with 1.65kg of milk per kg of dry matter when the yeast product was added to the ration, compared with just 1.5 litres of milk per kg of dry matter for the control diet.

Good silage quality is also essential for optimum efficiency and, with this year’s cut being particularly poor for many producers, mycotoxins could prove to be a problem.

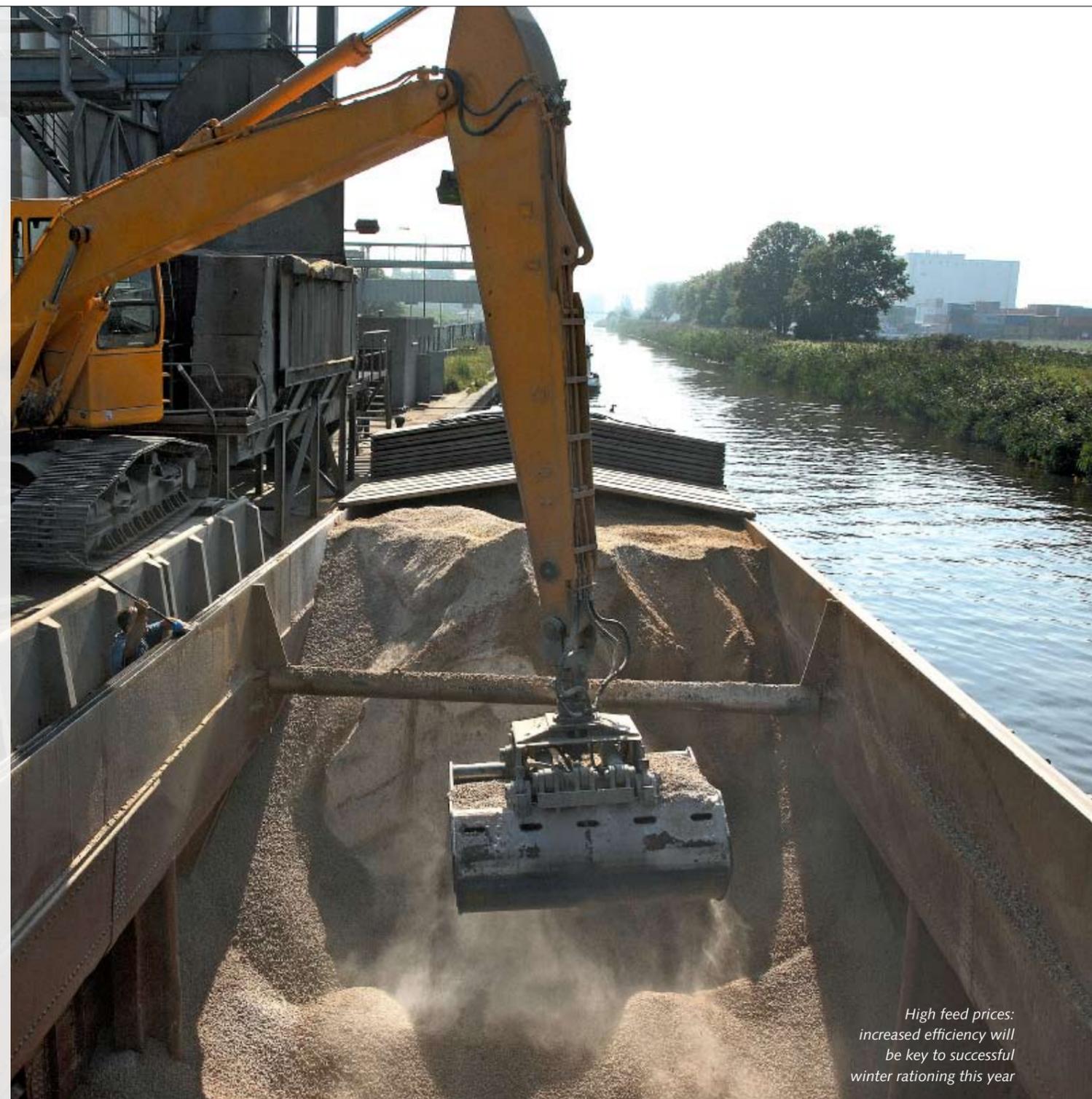
“Mycotoxins can have a significant impact on feed efficiency and could be present in dry first-cut silage and whole crop or second-cut grass that has been grown in variable conditions,” he says.

“If mycotoxins are suspected then we recommend a binder which can deal adequately with both fusarium and penicillium-borne mycotoxins.”

“The antibiotic effect of penicillium-borne mycotoxins has a negative impact on the good bacteria within the rumen, making it work less efficiently. So it is essential to eradicate them.”

With feed stocks tight, many producers are being tempted to try novel ingredients, according to Frank Wright Trow Nutrition International’s John Twigge.

“I have already been asked about the nutritive value of feeds as diverse as



*High feed prices: increased efficiency will be key to successful winter rationing this year*

## Additional tips on reducing feed costs

- Many producers still over feed protein, feeding diets containing 18-19% protein, when diets containing 16.8-17.5% protein work just as well, if not better.
- Look at the minerals – phosphorus, for example, is an expensive ingredient and most producers are feeding diets containing around 0.5% phosphorus,

when 0.36% phosphorous in the overall diet is sufficient. Reducing the phosphorus content of the mineral could reduce the cost of the mineral by between £25 and £30/tonne without compromising production or fertility.

- Fats are expensive this winter, at up to £1,170/tonne for pure palmitic acid oil. Sometimes rebalancing the digestible

fibre and adding buffers and yeasts can do more for milk quality than feeding expensive fats.

- Ask for quotes, or tender for your winter feed. Providing you stipulate the specifications of the feed you are after, you could save between £10 and £20/tonne without compromising on quality.

cucumber and beetroot. My advice would be to think carefully before committing to buying unusual ingredients.

“And certainly get them analysed and take advice from a competent nutritionist before making any buying decisions.”

Feed quality is vital – whatever you buy in. The energy content of dairy feed is key to its performance, according to Tim Davies.

“With the high cereal and oil prices, it is

possible that some commercial companies may downgrade the metabolisable energy (ME) content of their compound feed range to ME values of around 11 to 11.8 MJ/kg DM as a way of countering the high feed costs,” he says.

“But a fall in compound feed quality from an ME value of 12.8 MJ/kg DM, down to 12.0 MJ/kg DM will produce 146 litres less milk from a tonne of the lower energy compound feed (or 0.5 litres/cow/day for a

cow on 4 kg of concentrates per day). “This is equivalent to losing £33.50 of milk income per tonne of feed on a milk price of 23ppl.”

“Therefore, unless you are saving £33/tonne off the price of the compound feed, you are better off staying with the higher quality feeds.

“Apart from yield, the higher quality feeds will also do a better job with milk proteins and cow fertility,” he adds. |