

Boost grass growth, grazing quality and business performance

Making the most of forage

Improving yield per cow, particularly from forage, has been a key focus for one Welsh herd, which has increased profitability by improving grass utilisation. We visited them to find out more.

text **Emily Ball**

Making top-quality forage and altering calving pattern have significantly improved the performance of Dafydd and Catrin Parry's herd.

With help from son Tudur, the family runs its 70-cow herd on a 65-hectare unit at Bryn Cogail, near Beaumaris.

Average milk yields are around 8,000 litres per cow, at 4.10% butterfat and 3.27% protein, and milk is sold to Glanbia for mozzarella production. The family decided, two years ago, to move

the herd to a predominantly autumn-calving block and, at the same time, they also reassessed the quality of the forage they were feeding the cows throughout the year.

Cow performance

"We have some good genetics in our herd and we knew that we could push cow performance," says Dafydd.

"We realised that calving in late summer and early autumn, and then bringing



Catrin and Tudur Parry

the cows inside and onto winter rations, meant that we would be able to manage peak lactation much better.

"And it works well with our milk payment profile. We are also less busy at this time of year and are able to give the cows the attention they require during



the transition period – and also get them back in calf quickly.”

The herd is turned out to graze during the daytime in late March and cows are out day and night from the end of May. They then come back inside once they calve in the autumn but this year, with forage shortages due to the dry weather and if conditions allow, these cows may well continue to graze for a short period as fresh calvers.

Improved fertility

The winter TMR comprises grass silage, a blend, minerals and Lintec.

“We’ve added Lintec to both the cow and heifer rations to boost yield and fertility,” explains ForFarmers’ Dyfrig Hughes. He works closely with the family to provide the best nutrition for their herd.

Fertility has improved, particularly among the heifers. These are all served with sexed semen and 100% held to first service.

During the dry period, cows are fed 2.5kg of Translac rolls per day, for the three weeks prior to calving.



TOPGRASS paddocks:
cows grazing at Bryn Cogail

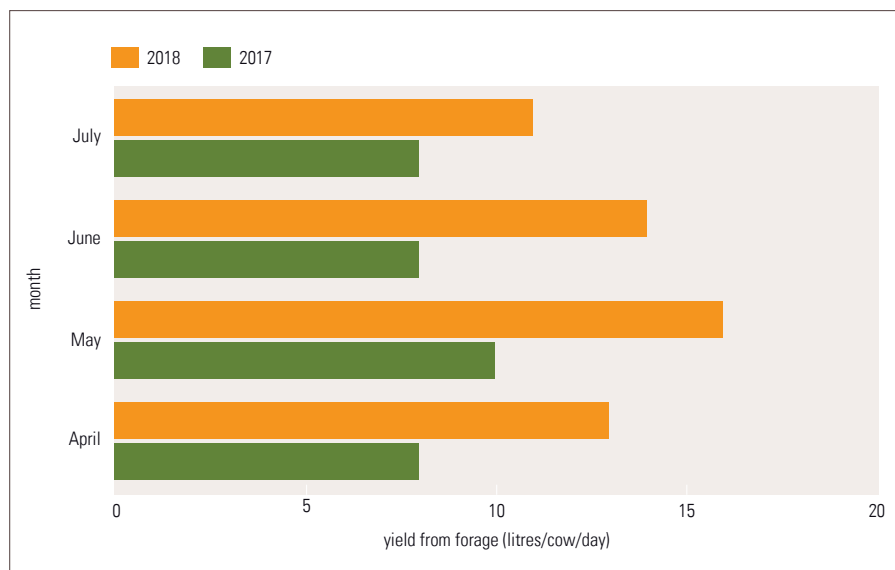


Figure 1: Improvement in milk from forage (April to July 2018 compared to 2017)

The Parrys have seen a reduction in the number of cases of milk fever. This has allowed the business to place greater reliance on the forage proportion of the diet.

Grazing strategy

Putting the right quality forage in front of the cows as grazed grass is crucial to success.

The Parrys decided to reseed some key grazing areas with a TOPGRASS graze and cut mixture. The dual-purpose ley offers high dry matter yields and D values, as well as high dry matter intakes, when grazed. It’s a blend of intermediate and later perennial ryegrass, with clover.

As of spring this year, the Parrys have also been using Sweet-Grass fertiliser. This is a high-nitrogen and sodium-enriched product from ForFarmers, which is formulated to increase sward palatability and maximise milk production.

This fertiliser provides the optimum level of sodium to grazed grass, which not only improves palatability and increases intakes, but also results in tighter grazing.

“We’ve really noticed a difference,” says Tudur. “The cows love to graze the new leys and take the grass down really well. We see much less in the way of rejection sites, even after the third grazing when other paddocks can have large areas of waste in them.

“You can tell that the grass is more palatable and intakes are up. As soon as cows are in calf and outside we reduce concentrate feeding and expect them to graze harder. So we have to know that

we’re putting palatable feed into them. “Yields from forage are now just below 3,000 litres per cow, and this was during a difficult spring grazing season. So we know that there’s more potential there.” The move to autumn calving and improving forage quality has seen milk from forage increase by 607 litres per cow, compared to the same grazing period in 2017 (see Figure 1).

And investing in new leys and fertiliser has improved grazed grass utilisation in 2018 to the tune of £8,012, between April and July.

Big-bale silage

All silage made at the unit is baled, eliminating the need to invest in a silage pit and offering the family greater flexibility when it comes to cutting the crop. They say that it also reduces inconsistencies within the silage and that this has a positive impact on rumen health.

“We make all our own silage and by opting for big bales we can cut individual fields when they are ready, rather than when the pit is open.

“This helps to improve quality,” explains Dafydd. “We triple wrap all bales to ensure that we have as little waste as possible.”

Silage analysis on big bales made in 2017 revealed a dry matter content of 37%, an ME of 11 MJ/kg DM and a D Value of 69%. “The family thought long and hard about making a change to their herds’ calving pattern, but it has really paid off,” adds Mr Hughes.

“Add to this the high-quality forage, both grazing and silage, and the cows are really showing their potential.”