

Maximising milk from forage is driver for Jersey herd success

Feeding for herd health and good fertility

Supplementing rations with omega-3 fatty acids is helping to maximise milk from forage, as well as cow health and fertility, in a modernised system. We visited the unit to find out more.

text **James Marshall**

Replacing traditional protected fats with a source of omega-3 fatty acids has helped one Surrey-based producer to ensure that his 130-cow herd of pedigree Jerseys stay healthy and fertile.

Mike Clear runs the herd at Pierrepont Farm, near Farnham in Surrey, with help from wife Bev and herdsman Emily Murch. Managed on 83 hectares and averaging 7,000 litres, at 5.53% butterfat and 3.80% protein, Mike is looking to maximise the herd's milk from forage.

"We want to get as much milk as possible from forage and grazing," he explains.

"We have light, sandy soil here, so we aim to get cows out as soon as possible in February or March.

"Since the decline in milk price a few years ago, we've run a more intensive grazing set up. We have divided our grazing area into 18-hectare paddocks, which are then sub-divided so that we can get a day or 1.5 days of grazing from each.

"The cows are much keener to get out and graze since we switched to this system. Previously there used to be a drop off in grazing 'enthusiasm' in June, when grass covers were low," says Mike.



ForFarmers' Peter Cade (left) and Mike Clear

"Milk from forage is running at 36% and we are targeting 45%."

Robotic milking

Since taking on the farm tenancy 11 years ago, he has modernised and restructured the dairy unit and installed a robotic milking system.

"The robots work really well with our grazing-based system and we have just installed a third robot on the farm," he says. "Cows are visiting the robots and being milked an average of 2.8 times a day, but this goes up to 3.2 visits during



Jersey herd: Mike Clear is looking to maximise milk from forage

the winter. The new robot should also help us to increase milk from forage. With the third robot in place, there will be less waiting around to be milked, so cows will be back out into the paddocks to graze much quicker than they used to be.”

Partial TMR

In order to maintain yields and milk quality during the summer months, grazing is supplemented with a partial TMR. This comprises big-bale silage, wholecrop barley, minerals, limestone flour, and a non-mineralised pellet protein.

In the winter, maize replaces the wholecrop and Levucell yeast and home-grown fodder beet are also added to the ration. “Everything is put together in our mixer wagon and we feed a 16% protein concentrate to yield through the robots,” explains Mike. “We also include Lintec, a source of omega-3 fatty acids, in the partial TMR. This is fed at different inclusion rates throughout the year to help maintain good cow health and fertility.”

Mike first started supplementing cows with omega-3 on a previous unit he managed on Jersey. It was here he met ForFarmers’ business manager Peter Cade, who advocates using Lintec in dairy rations.

“It uses selected varieties of linseed, which are high in omega-3 fatty acids,” explains Peter. “These help to improve udder health and function, milk production and, most importantly in Mike’s case, support fertility. The supplement also helps to balance cows’ hormone levels, reduce embryonic mortality, and improve signs of oestrus.”

With Mike’s cows grazing extensively throughout the year and grass being a good source of omega-3, Lintec is used strategically to boost cow intakes during times of lower grass supply. He feeds it ‘neat’ through the mixer wagon, at an inclusion rate of 0.5kg, as soon as cows are housed for the winter. “In the spring and summer, he reduces or completely stops feeding the supplement,” explains Peter. “But cow health and fertility are tracked via a regular Visiolac monitoring report service. So we can alter feeding rates, if required, to ensure that cows are getting the best support.”

Good fertility

Mike has been using Lintec since he took on the tenancy at Pierrepont and is pleased with the results. “We calve in four blocks, but are looking to reduce this to two larger blocks in the future,” he explains. “Getting cows and heifers in calf quickly – and on time – is important to maintain tight blocks and this supplement helps us to achieve this. “Our current calving index is between 390 and 400 days and conception rates are well above 50%. We sometimes achieve rates of 65%, which is good for our system and milk yield with Jerseys.

“I think that the supplement helps to keep our cows healthy and productive. And if a cow is healthy then she is easy to manage and maintain,” he says. “That makes my job – and life – much easier and it also reduces the costs associated with health or fertility problems.” |



Dry cows at Pierrepont Farm

Automatic milking: cows visit the robot, on average, 2.8 times each day

