



THE BENEFITS OF ADDING WATER TO A TMR



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Feed sorting remains one of the most common challenges encountered on dairy farms feeding Total Mixed Rations (TMRs). While emphasis is placed on forage quality, chop length and providing a balanced diet, sometimes the diet the cows actually consume can be very different.

Sorting behaviour is a natural response by dairy cows, particularly when presented with dry rations containing a wide range of particle sizes, for example, concentrates, chopped straw, root crops and silages. Although individual sorting behaviour may appear insignificant, the cumulative effect across a herd can substantially alter nutrient intake and rumen function.

The consequences can be a very different diet being consumed by dominant cows compared with timid heifers or cows lower in the pecking order. If diets are not eaten evenly, the risk of subacute ruminal acidosis (SARA) increases. Fluctuating rumen pH can limit fibre digestion and negatively influence milk fat production. In addition to this, the milk yields produced from the diet can alter drastically if diet intakes are variable.

Adding water to the diet can increase intakes and reduce sorting. However, bear in mind that,

with current temperatures, diets can warm up and cause feed spoilage. Mixing the water will mean that cows cannot sort the diet as easily due to the wet nature of the ration and ensure a more balanced intake. Ideally, you should be aiming for a diet dry matter of between 38-42% to prevent sorting, increasing intakes and overall palatability.

The method of water addition is equally important. Water should be introduced gradually during the mixing process rather than applied immediately before feed-out. Even distribution throughout the ration allows forage particles to absorb moisture and improves adhesion between ingredients without creating excessively wet pockets within the mix. Fundamentally, it needs to be easy to do so that it can get carried out efficiently. A large pump provides a quick and easy addition to the mix. A few different options to include water in the ration would be:

- A fixed water pipe on the wagon with a volume washer attachment. This way the feeder wagon can have water filled while simultaneously distributing water evenly across the mix.
- A large volume output pipe dropping down, mimicking a molasses outlet. If the outlet pipe can have multiple entry points into the wagon, it will then improve the consistency of the mix that is then fed out to the cows.

Monitoring refusals provides valuable feedback on ration performance. Refusals containing disproportionately high levels of long forage indicate ongoing sorting and should prompt investigation of ration moisture and mixing efficiency. Similarly, observing cow feeding behaviour immediately after fresh feed delivery can provide useful insight into the extent of ingredient selection occurring within the herd.

Water is arguably the least costly ingredient available on the farm, yet when used strategically it can significantly improve ration consistency, reduce sorting and support more stable rumen function.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER TO THE ANIMAL

Water availability is just as important outside of the TMR. High yielding cows can drink up to 200 litres a day. Cows need to have 70cm of water trough space per cow. This equates to a 100-cow herd having a minimum of 7m of total water trough space. Trough space should allow 10% of the herd to drink at any one time. Water pressure needs to be rapid refilling, so water is always in front of the cows. Cows can drink 14 litres a minute, so 10 cows drinking simultaneously can consume 140 litres every minute.

In this heat, many herds would have seen the effects and pressure points of water supply during the hot weather and adding water to a TMR only increases this demand. Careful planning of water tank storage and supply is becoming increasingly important with the weather patterns the summer months seem to be giving up.

INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT

As the hot, dry weather continues, the focus on farm has been to buffer stock with forage outside, finding as much shade as possible and keeping plenty of fresh water in front of them. When it finally does rain, grass will grow like spring grass and later cuts of forage will be taken. We've all seen it before.

Now, I know some of you think we're mad when we advise you to add water to your TMR diet, but we can take you to many herds that have tried it and wouldn't go back because they have seen extra production and health benefits from doing so.

There is always going to be conflict somewhere in the world and, with the recent hot weather across Europe, forward buying of raw materials is crucial. We have always had the policy to buy little and often to spread our risk. We have excellent cover until Christmas and good cover from January to April 2027. If you haven't covered your feed for the winter, it's time to get some cover in the book.

We have a calf/ dairy farm walk scheduled for the end of September and hope to see many of you there. We also look forward to catching up with you at your local one-day show over the coming months.



Glen Johns
Sales Director
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RAW MATERIALS

OVERVIEW

Firstly, July saw the ceasefire between the US and Iran in the Middle East come to an end, with crude oil rebounding above \$85 per barrel.

We then saw Ukraine attack Russian ships in the Azov Sea and the Black Sea. On Friday 10th July, the Russian government closed the Azov-Don Canal as well as the Kerch Strait. Historically, 20-30% of Russian wheat was exported via the Azov Sea. In retaliation, Russia has started bombing Ukrainian infrastructure, including the ports of Odessa and Chornomorsk. It remains unclear how long this will last or whether the conflict could escalate further.

Alongside these geopolitical developments, hot weather across Europe could potentially affect yields on some crops.

CEREALS

Grain prices rallied following the escalation between Russia and Ukraine, with reduced wheat exports through the Azov Sea. The week after the Azov-Don Canal and the Kerch Strait closed, wheat prices jumped by £18 per tonne. Traders feared a repeat of 2022, increasing forward premiums. At the time of writing, it remains unclear how long these Black Sea escalations will continue. Even if the Azov Sea returns to normal, exports are likely to remain behind schedule, while Ukraine is expected to be restricted due to the damage caused by the retaliation attacks.

The heatwave across Europe is likely to reduce yields. The French maize crop is likely to be 30-40% down on last year, with EU production around 10% lower. Reports suggest the UK will only produce a 13MT wheat crop, down from 13.8MT that was anticipated due to reduced yields.

PROTEINS

China continues to import US soya beans to meet its targets. Shipping delays continue to keep material in short supply. Globally, soya remains plentiful, but geopolitical risks could keep prices inflated. The conflict in the Black Sea will also have an effect, with both Ukraine and Russia among the world's largest sunseed and rapeseed exporters. Low water levels on the Rhine mean that rapeseed cannot be shipped in the quantities required, placing further pressure on other protein sources such as sunflower and soya.

FIBRES

New crop sugar beet prices remain inflated with a lack of supply, both domestically and through imports. Soya hulls look an extremely attractive option and are well worth considering for the winter.



Andrew Davies
Operations Director
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FINISHING BEEF CATTLE

With the price of finished cattle recovering slightly, now is the time to plan late summer and autumn sales of beef cattle. As I write, we are in our third heatwave of the summer, grazing grass is suffering and aftermaths are light.

Cattle are looking good but are not finishing on grass alone. We need to get the troughs out and start feeding straightaway. Please ensure your finishing cattle are sorted into even bunches and label each group with the month you want them to finish.

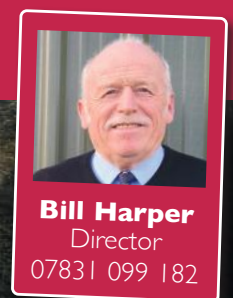
Protect against flies using full rate pour on treatments and check dung samples for worms, including lungworm, and treat accordingly.

Feed Harpers Beef Finisher Rolls or Nuts, both formulated with Levucell Yeast, to help achieve optimum growth rates and finish.

A forage analysis allows a ration to be tailored to your forage and cattle. To plan your feeding, contact your Harpers Feeds Specialist.

Our Diet Check feed plans have proved very effective, and having a summer feed plan is as important as a winter one. Plans may need adjusting as we get to the autumn flush of grass, when maintaining nutrients within the rumen becomes more challenging. We are carrying out some interesting trial work using garlic in a Molasses Mix diet, looking at both fly prevention and the digestive process. Results to follow.

Beef margins have tightened in the last six months, which brings into focus the most critical figures in beef production, which is age and weight at slaughter. Any cattle that are not growing at a kilo plus a day are not pulling their weight, and their diet and health needs checking and adjusting accordingly. Please contact us to discuss your finishing programme further.



Bill Harper
Director
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MAXIMISING LAMB PERFORMANCE THROUGH TARGETED NUTRITION

At Seccombe Farm, nutrition is a key driver of flock performance. The family business, run by Rob, Gail and Jake, manage 1,700 ewes alongside 220 head of beef cattle, producing high-quality lambs that finish early and achieve premium market specifications.

The flock consists predominantly of Suffolk Mule ewes, chosen for their maternal ability and milk production. To maximise lamb vigour and carcass quality, they are put to Charolais, Charolais x Texel and Suffolk x Charolais rams, producing fast-growing lambs with excellent finishing potential.

The lambing system is designed to spread workload while targeting early market opportunities. Around 550 ewes are synchronised using progesterone sponges before tupping, to start lambing indoors from early January, with returners being lambed at the end of the month. A further 350 ewes are tupped naturally to lamb indoors in early March, while the remaining 800 ewes and any empty ewes identified at scanning are lambed outdoors during April.

Despite experiencing an exceptionally dry summer, the business maintained excellent flock performance through proactive nutritional management.

To support conception rates and ewe body condition, the early lambing ewes received 0.5kg of Lamb Finisher Nuts per head per day, 3 weeks prior and throughout tupping. The April lambing flock was flushed using high-energy feed buckets, ensuring ewes entered the breeding season in optimum condition.

The results of supplement feeding were clear, with the early lambing flock achieving an average scanning percentage of 172%, an excellent result for progesterone-synchronised ewes, particularly in a dry year. This provided the foundation for a productive lamb crop and demonstrates the value of target feeding during challenging conditions.

The early lambing flock is housed 2–3 weeks before lambing, depending on weather, ground conditions and number of lambs being carried. Supplement feeding of Harpers 18% Super Ewe Rolls and Lifeline Lamb and Ewe buckets starts four weeks before lambing, with triplets receiving 0.75kg and doubles 0.5kg per day. Singles receive only Lifeline Lamb and Ewe buckets until housing. Once housed, ewes are fed high quality haylage and compound feed is gradually stepped up to 1.5kg for triplets, 1kg for doubles and 0.5kg for singles.

Post lambing, ewes and lambs are turned to grass as soon as 24 hours, weather permitting. Once lambs reach three weeks of age, Rapid Lamb 18% Pellets + Yeast are introduced through creep feeders to encourage early feed intake and maximise growth. The highly palatable ration supports rumen development while providing the energy and protein needed for early performance. The aim is to wean the January and February born lambs at around ten weeks of age, with a target liveweight of over 30kg.

Following weaning, lambs are housed on an ad-lib ration of Rapid Lamb 18% Pellets + Yeast and straw.

This simple but effective finishing system allows the lambs to achieve their growth potential, regularly recording daily liveweight gains of up to 500g.

Early finishing is fundamental to the farm's business strategy. The first lambs are marketed from just 12 weeks of age, with weekly consignments sent to Dunbia Jaspers abattoir near Launceston throughout the season.

By the end of June, an impressive 837 lambs had been finished, averaging a 21kg deadweight carcass at E, U and R grades. Strong demand meant that 646 of those lambs achieved prices of more than £9.00 per kilo, rewarding the investment made in nutrition and flock management earlier in the year.

Finishing large numbers of lambs before summer delivers significant grazing advantages. Reducing stocking pressure before grass growth declines leaves more grazing for breeding ewes, replacement stock and the beef enterprise, reducing reliance on purchased forage and improving overall grassland management.

At Seccombe Farm, targeted nutrition is seen as an investment rather than a cost. Combining carefully selected genetics with strategic ewe supplementation and early lamb creep feeding has enabled the business to consistently achieve high scanning percentages, exceptional lamb growth rates and premium market returns.

For more information on our range of lamb feeds, speak to your Harpers Feeds Specialist.



Myles Jones
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AUTUMN RESEEDING

Now is the perfect time to evaluate and assess your grass swards. Older leys contain a larger proportion of unproductive species, as well as broad leaf weeds, which can form in the gaps caused by disappearing ryegrass.

Reseeding with newer, more efficient varieties can dramatically improve yield, energy content, and nitrogen-use efficiency.

- Increased dry matter yield: Older swards, with only 50% sown species, yield around 7t DM/ha. A newly reseeded sward can yield up to 15.5t DM/ha.
- More energy from grass: Each additional tonne of DM can generate approximately 11,000 MJ of energy, which translates into 2,000 litres of milk or 234kg of lamb or beef.

- Improved nitrogen-use efficiency: Ryegrass swards are far more efficient at utilising nitrogen (up to 100%, compared to just 17% efficiency in annual meadow grasses).

Autumn reseeded allows plants to establish strong root systems before winter, leading to vigorous spring growth and therefore enhancing productivity and profitability.

Speak to your rep about our HF range of grass seeds and agrochemicals.

TRANSITION MANAGEMENT PAYS OFF FOR CLARICK HERD

Preparing the herd for the transition period has been a key focus of the management of the Clarick herd at Tresallick Farm, in Cornwall, and the results have paid off with impressive performance figures.

As 1st generation farmers, Patrick and Claire Barrett approached their business management with exceptional attention to detail and a drive to succeed. This ambition continues with son Jack, who joined the business in 2016, and their combined focus to detail has proved hugely successful for herd health and production.

The 480-cow Holstein herd currently yields 10,500 litres/yr, with an impressive 4.75% butterfat and 3.8% protein. As suppliers to a cheese producer, the herd's breeding policy has concentrated on components in recent years, with attention to traits for a functional type.

"A strong dairy type cow provides us with the foundation to build an efficient herd. If we then get the management right, and nutrition is absolutely critical in this, we get the results we need to be a profitable herd," says Jack.

The all-year-round calving system provides a consistent daily TMR, with the farm aiming for self-sufficiency in feeds as much as possible. *"We farm 1200 acres, consisting of maize, wheat, barley and grass, and are always looking at ways to maximise the efficiencies of the crops we feed."*

DRY PERIOD

"The dry period is so important to get the animals ready for lactation and that's an area we really focus on," says Jack. *"We allocate specific fields, that are low in potassium, for the dry cow forage and use specific seed mixtures to best suit their requirements."*

We also prioritise grouping the dry's into a far-off group and a close up; where cows are separated 3 weeks pre calving. This has transformed our transition results, as cows are now better prepared for calving and early lactation through a targeted nutrition plan."

Steve Jones, Ruminant Feed Specialist at Harpers Feeds, *"We feed a TMR to all the dry cows consisting of 7.25kg/head of dry cow big square bale, 7.25kg maize silage, 4kg of wheat straw, 2kg soya, 0.75kg rolled wheat and 0.2kg minerals. The haylage is tested annually for minerals, and Harpers Tresallick Precalver; a bespoke mineral package, is formulated to balance the diet. HF X-Zelit, a calcium binder that naturally stimulates the cow to mobilise her own calcium reserves, is added at 3 weeks pre calving into a custom blend containing 1.75kg rolled wheat, 0.15kg soya, 0.1kg minerals and 0.5kg X-Zelit."*

"We absolutely swear by the X-Zelit," stresses Jack. *"It has to be introduced at 3 weeks pre calving to be effective and we just pour the blend along the barrier at a rate of 2.5kg/cow. I cannot remember the last time we had milk fever."*

Commenting on the herd performance, Steve concludes, *"The nutrition at pre calving sets the herd up for a hassle free and high performing lactation, which is good for the animals, the people and the longevity of the herd."*

For more information, please contact Harpers Feeds on 01409 254 300.



AVOID TEMPTATION TO FEED WHOLE MILK TO CALVES

When milk prices fall, farmers are urged to avoid the temptation to feed whole milk to calves.

Farmers risk compromising calf health and the long-term sustainability and yield potential of their herd by cutting costs and feeding calves whole milk.

That's the message from milk feeding specialists who are reminding rearers of the health risks associated with feeding whole milk and urging farmers to feed a quality calf milk replacer (CMR) and not to cut costs in the milk feeding stage.

Stacey Bruna from Feed For Growth (Volac Milk Replacers Limited) says the milk feeding period lays the foundations for success. *"It's always worth investing in calf growth, whatever the milk price,"* she explains. *"Ultimately, you're investing in your herd's future. If you cut back now, you're not making the most of high feed conversion efficiency during the milk feeding stage."*

"By feeding whole milk, you could also inadvertently introduce disease, which could have a detrimental impact on growth and stop heifers from calving in at 24 months, which is the optimum for health, survival and higher lifetime daily yield."

The Massey Harpers Calfpriide range of calf milk replacers is suitable for all calf rearing systems and offers a bio-secure way to rear your calves, speak to your Massey Harpers rep to discuss your calf rearing needs.

During the month of September and some of October we are making improvements to the press line which make our rolls and nuts. Our priority is to keep you supplied so as much notice as possible would be appreciated as some of the rolls will be coming from our sister mill.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

EVENT	DATE	LOCATION
North Devon Show	Wednesday 5th August	Umbrellagh, Devon
Honiton Show	Thursday 6th August	Gittisham, EX14 3AW
Camelford	Wednesday 12th August	Marshgate, PL32 9YN
Exford Show	Wednesday 12th August	Rooksmean, TA24 7PP
Okehampton Show	Thursday 13th August	Okehampton, EX20 1SW
Dunster Show	Friday 21st August	Dunster, TA24 6NY
Summer Bank Holiday	Monday 31st August	Summer Bank Holiday
Holsworthy Show	Thursday 27th August	Killatree, Holsworthy, EX22 6LP
Kingsbridge Show	Saturday 5th September	Borough Farm, TQ9 7QP
Calf and Dairy Seminar	Tuesday 29th September	Braunton -further details to follow