HARPERS FEEDS
Focused on nutrition

feedtalk

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KNOW YOUR FORAGE BEFORE WINTER STARTS

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With the drought conditions we have seen over the summer months playing havoc with grass growth it is crucial to assess forage stocks and quality before winter feeding starts.

Doing this means you know the tonnage in the clamps, and also the quality of forages you have to feed. It's better to plan ahead now, knowing the forage tonnages available, so you can source earlier in the season and make plans to reduce forage to certain groups. For example, bulling heifers moving over to a straw and concentrate diet to reduce forage use and prioritise forage for the milking herd if required.

If you want assistance with measuring your forage stocks, please contact your feed specialist to support you in doing this and planning for the winter months.

Comparing forages to last year, it is pleasing to see the increase in ME for the first cut averages. Having an additional 0.7MJ of energy is a huge difference, whether this is feeding to dairy cows or fattening cattle. The great weather in the spring has promoted earlier 1st cut harvesting, giving high sugar forages and the extra energy we are seeing.

What will have to be monitored is the higher dry matter 2nd cuts. Careful observation of forage DM intakes at trough level is crucial to ensure that sorting doesn't happen.

The latest flush of grass is going to be very welcome to many farms, both for making extra forage and extending the grazing opportunity in areas that ground conditions allow. Due to the drought conditions, it is expected that nitrogen that has been applied has lain dormant and any grass growth we get currently is like a spring flush.

Grass Silage Comparison

Diet Name	1st Cut 2026	2nd Cut 2026	1st Cut 2025	2nd Cut 2025
Dry Matter	35%	38%	37%	37%
ME	11.3	11.1	10.6	11.1
Protein	13.6%	13.2%	13.3%	13.5%

As you can see on the diagram below, the latest grass results taken are showing really high protein levels. Make sure that a suitable additive is used to make use of this available protein, and to ensure that this cut that's ensiled doesn't end up being a wet butyric mush in the clamp.

MAGNIVA Platinum Grass Wet additive works with later cut grass that can be harder to ensile, particularly when harvested wet, as it can have lower available sugars, higher fibre and greater buffering capacity. A reliable fermentation is therefore important to minimise nutrient losses.

MAGNIVA Platinum Grass Wet contains two complementary lactic acid bacteria: *Hilgardii* and *Buchneri*. *Hilgardii* helps drive a rapid and efficient fermentation, encouraging a quick reduction in pH and helping to preserve nutrients during the early stages of ensiling. *Buchneri* supports aerobic stability, helping to control yeasts and moulds when the clamp is opened. This can reduce heating and deterioration at the feed face. A better fermentation helps retain more of the nutrients originally harvested, including dry matter and true protein — particularly valuable when dealing with a wet and challenging crop.

If not ensiled and grazed instead, high protein grass can have a detrimental effect on any in calf animals. It will create large calves if the far offs are grazed solely on these fresh grass aftermaths and are not restricted and complemented with a lower protein forage as well.

When reading this, many farms would have completed their maize harvest, with varying yields. Early tests have shown that maize dry matters are around 30-32%, with starch in the early to mid-30's. The starch and high glucose in the maize forage is going to complement some of the higher NDF forages that were made mid drought period and also provide an earlier than normal opportunity to get a reseed or arable crop planted.

With the range of grass seeds available from the shop, take advantage of the earlier harvest and get your autumn reseed done, or your winter cover crop sorted.

Speak to your feed or shop specialist to explore the range of seed mixtures we have available.

Current Grass Silage Analysis

Dry Matter	%	13.1	8 14 20 26
Crude Protein	%	31.1	8 16 24 32
ME	MJ/kg	12.5	10 11 12 13
Sugars	%	5.5	4.0 14 20 26
NDF	%	43.9	35.0 40.0 45.0 50.0
ADF	%	23.7	10 20 30 40
Oil A	%	4.2	3 4 5 6
Free Nitrates - Fresh	mg/kg	2500	0 500 1000 1500

INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT

All of a sudden, the countryside has sprung back to life.

What a difference the last two weeks have made. Many have managed a late third or fourth cut, but May/ June/ July hot weather and bluetongue has played havoc on farms. Hopefully, by the time the rams go into the main flock, ram fertility will be back on track. One thing is for sure, keep those rams in with the ewes as long as it takes. A pregnant ewe is better than an empty ewe.

It is similar for milking herds, with extreme heat producing poor conception rates for spring and early summer calvings. Two things to look out for this autumn:

1. Lungworm in grazing youngstock, particularly as we are all going to keep them out as long as possible. Check FECs and get your RAMA rep to check muck samples.
2. Check in-calf heifers and dry cows. Grass at present is like spring grass, high in energy, protein and potassium. Please restrict their intakes by buffering with haylage, hay or wholecrop.

Raw material markets remain volatile, although cover bought earlier has helped keep our price increase to a minimum.

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GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS

Overview

The escalation between Russia and Ukraine continues to restrict exports of grain from the Black Sea, while Chinese buying of soya and a possible relaxation of tariffs have prompted a soya rally. Crude oil has climbed over $100 per barrel with continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz. A stronger dollar following the Fed's rate increase means dollar-based commodities will be more expensive.

Funds currently hold long positions to minimise any risk, but when they start to sell, we are likely to see prices fall. Drought conditions over the summer have also left many shippers short of ingredients in ports, causing large premiums.

Cereals

Cereal prices continue to be underpinned by the lack of exports from the Black Sea. Combined Russian and Ukrainian wheat exports are estimated at only 8MT between July and September, compared to the five-year average of 18.2MT. Traders still feel an agreement will be reached, limiting further upward pressure. Long term, the grain is still there, just not accessible. The big question is, how long?

In the UK, growers remain reluctant sellers, forcing wheat to trade at higher premiums above futures.

Proteins

Soya has rallied, driven by Chinese buying and talks of China relaxing tariffs on US agricultural products. At the time of writing, soya is just under £400 per tonne, increasing £40 per tonne in only a few weeks.
Lack of supply from Argentina and no exports from the Black Sea have also seen sunflower prices rise.

Fibres

Drought across Europe and the UK has affected sugar beet crops, leading to a shortage of sugar beet pulp and increased demand for soya hulls as a fibre source.

Final thoughts

With the logistical and geopolitical issues we are seeing, it is difficult to see how prices can fall in the short term. However, if an agreement was made in the Black Sea, the Strait of Hormuz returned to normality and funds sold their long positions, the market would look very different.

BEEF FINISHING

With the beef trade firming, we all have important decisions to make on how we finish our cattle in the next few months. If cattle are 550kg+, you need to keep them going to reach finish weight and condition by the middle of November.

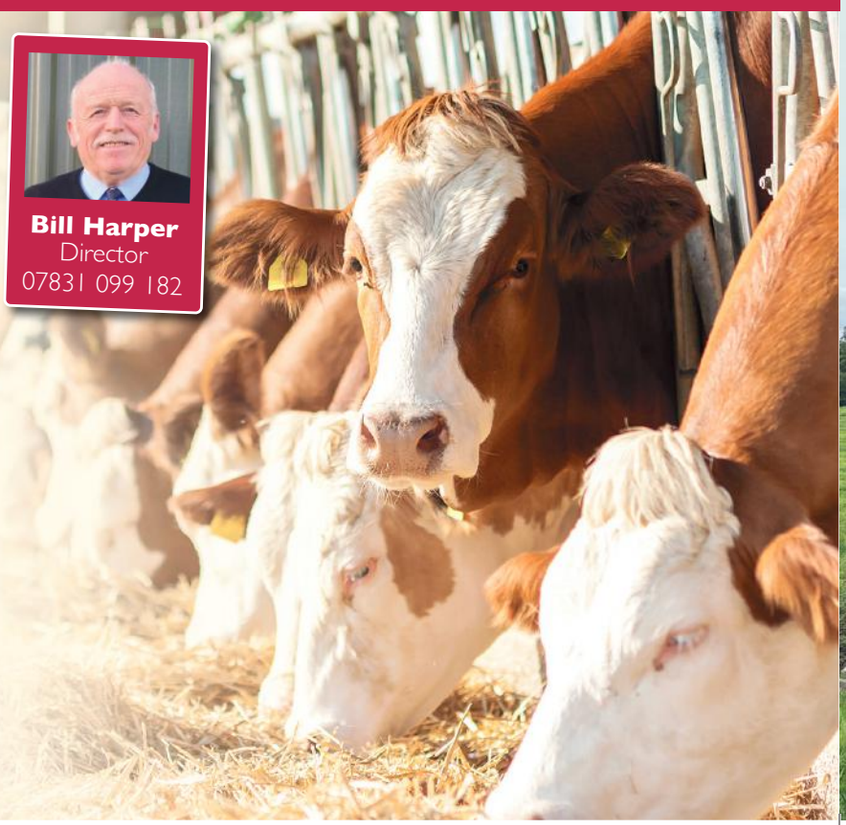
Anything that can be finished off grass, forage and concentrate outside will save considerably on straw, probably the highest priced of our inputs. While grass is still lush, forage needs to be dry and in long fibre form, with concentrates balanced and fed at around 1kg per 100kg liveweight.

Indoor finishing rations should be calculated by your Harpers Feeds ruminant specialist. Please have your main forage source tested as soon as possible.

If you have no cereals on farm, we can specify a compound or molassed mix to complement your forage. We recommend Premier Beef Nuts including maize for continental cross cattle and Beef Finisher Nuts for native cross cattle.

With limited cereals, we recommend a molassed mix balancer, mixed 50:50 with your cereals. If you have plenty of grain, including barley and oats, we can construct a ration using our 33% Cattle Protein Pellets to maximise cereal use.

Please ring for further discussion or a visit.



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STUDY TOUR TO IRELAND

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Monday morning was an early wake-up call for the 40-odd delegates who travelled to Ireland for this year's dairy excursion. A 2 o'clock wake-up call was needed to catch the early flight to Dublin, ready for a busy three days.

First on the agenda was a trip to the University of Dublin's farming research unit and a talk from Dr Finbar Mulligan. He ran the group through ten years of the farm's research into extensive spring-calving paddock grazing, alongside buffer feeding and parlour feeding at 1.5 tonnes per cow. The aim is to achieve the maximum kg of solids from as much grass as possible, with the herd currently aiming for 625kg of butterfat and protein.

The data has so far shown an average of 587kg of butterfat and protein across the herd's ten-year average. This is below target, but includes some very challenging years within that period.

The 250-hectare farm has 180 cows being milked in a spring block-calving system, alongside 400 breeding ewes, dairy beef retained from the herd, poultry and pigs.

Lunch followed the talk before our first 'factory tour' at Tullamore Whiskey Distillery, with some small samples and a look at the company's heritage and links to Ireland's farming communities.

Day two gave the whole group a chance to visit the 'legendary' Irish Ploughing Match. The 700-acre site is attended by more than 300,000 people each year – roughly one in 20 people in Ireland!

With more than 30 aisles of agricultural equipment, hardware and innovation, there was plenty to see. That's not to mention the huge areas dedicated to direct sales of farm clothing and produce and, of course, the ploughing itself.

Day three saw a jam-packed schedule of three farm tours and a carvery lunch before the late flight home.

Farm one was an intensive, high-yielding herd, focusing on producing high-constituent litres from home-grown forages. It was a true family farm, developed across three farming generations, with a fine herd of pedigree Holsteins. Having won their milk pool's milk quality award for the last 12 consecutive years, the family were working as a team to produce home-bred heifers for the herd and continue their winning streak.

Farm two was an extensive robot herd, with a keen focus on milk solids from home-grown forages.

The robot had been introduced to help with the farm's labour issues and, in the farmer's own words, was "allowing the farm to stay in dairying".

The farm utilised an ABC grazing scenario. This is dividing the farm into 3 allocations of 8-hour grazing intervals. The increase on forage intakes and the encouragement of moving to a fresh pasture promotes additional milkings, and a higher milk yield from forage.

Farm three was an integrated beef unit set up across five holdings. The farmer had joined a beef scheme, sourcing beef calves from four dairy farms and taking all beef animals, including Friesians, through to finish. Some were finished in slatted sheds as bulls, while others, mainly native heifers, were finished at grass.

The scheme allowed the farmer to gain bonuses based on breed and age at slaughter, alongside an annual bonus for scheme membership, totalling around 50 euro cents/kg deadweight.

By this stage, there were a few very tired eyes and weary bodies, but everyone made it back to the mainland in good spirits.

Take-home points for all:

- If you don't measure it, you can't monitor it.
- Have goals for your business. They can be both short and long term.
- 75% of the time, it pays to feed compound feed for marginal litres.

Keep your eyes open for more upcoming events and trips in the coming months and years. The standard was high on this one, but we will aim even higher on the next!

SUCCESSFUL LAMBING STARTS AT TUPPING

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As we enter autumn, off the back of a challenging year for sheep, with prolonged drought and bluetongue hitting us badly, we must focus on doing everything possible to ensure ewes and rams are in tip-top condition. Ensuring ewes get in lamb and rams can do their job successfully is vital.

Firstly, looking at ewe condition, the majority of flocks in the South West have been supplementary feeding ewes with forage, concentrate or both over the summer when normally they would be grazing. Most have held condition, but not all, especially older ewes and those challenged with the virus.

Assessing condition in good time is vital. We are aiming for a body condition score of 3+ for most ewes and at least 2.5+ in hill ewes at tupping. It takes at least four weeks on very good grass or feeding 0.5–0.75kg a day of Harpers 18% Super Ewe Nuts or Harpers 15% Lamb Finisher, to put one body condition score on a ewe. It can be worthwhile grouping thinner ewes and targeting them with concentrate and Hi Energy sheep bucket. It's an investment that pays in the following lamb crop.

Rams

Bluetongue virus can significantly impair ram fertility, causing poor semen quality and temporary infertility. Timely intervention is essential, as the quality of semen produced today will reflect the condition the ram was in approximately seven weeks ago. With several rams unfortunately having bluetongue this year, we are seeing infertile rams when fertility tested.

The time taken for sperm to develop is 50 days, which could have implications for tupping and lambing. With many veterinary practices running fertility clinics, it is advisable to work closely with your vet. Rams do eventually recover sperm production, but fertility for the coming season could be variable.

Rams should be in good condition (BCS 3.5–4) going out to ewes. Supplementation with concentrate such as Harpers Lamb Finisher Nuts or Harpers Harvest Tup Mix can also help improve semen quality. Testicles should be even, firm and of normal size, at least 32cm circumference for ram lambs and 34cm for older rams.

Management

Effective and reliable marking lets you know which ewes have been tupped, by which ram and when. Ewes can then be grouped by expected due dates if shed space is limited. Using different colour crayons, changed regularly, can also help spot rams that are perhaps underperforming.

Vaccinations/Worming

Timely vaccinations pre-tupping are important. If ewes are lambing with weak lambs, fewer lambs than initially scanned for, or scanning rates are lower than anticipated, an underlying disease issue may be a problem. Depending on the stage of pregnancy when the ewe is infected, toxoplasmosis can lead to stillbirths, foetal death or weak lambs. Enzootic abortion will most commonly lead to abortion in the last few weeks of pregnancy, but can occasionally lead to weak, premature lambs or stillbirths.

Worm challenges this autumn are also likely to be high, so monitoring with faecal egg counts and treating accordingly will be important.

Please contact your Feed Specialist to make sure this year's tupping leads to a successful lambing in 2027.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

EVENT	DATE	LOCATION
The Dairy Show	Wednesday 7th October	Shepton Mallet, BA4 6QN
Launceston VS Exmouth Rugby	Saturday 24th October BOOKING REQUIRED	Launceston RFC, PL15 9QT
Kivells Dairy Event	Wednesday 28th October	Holsworthy Market
AgriFest	Wednesday 4th November	Westpoint, Exeter EX5 1DJ
Helston Fatstock Show	Saturday 14th November	Franchis Farm, TR13 0LT
Okehampton VS Ivybridge Rugby	Saturday 14th November BOOKING REQUIRED	Okehampton RFC, EX20 1JB
Massey Harpers Open Day	Thursday 3rd December	Massey Harpers, EX226FU
Wadebridge VS Crediton Rugby	Saturday 12th December BOOKING REQUIRED	Wadebridge RFC, PL7 6AQ

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