

## Information is KEY and you can never have too much!

It has been a while since my last update and there has been a lot happening/learned since. Ben has given me a majority of the control when formulating the rations for the milking herd. It has been a pretty daunting task and I tend to take it very personally if the cows do not perform well to one of my rations. At first, it seemed like my four years of schooling had no bearing on what was being done on Ben's farm. The ever changing pasture/weather conditions seemed to throw a wrench in the cog no matter what I do. But I have learned heaps from Ben and other New Zealand farmers about managing the pasture and adding rations with them. A good quote "Manage and feed your pasture first, then use your supplement to fill the gap." Before I delve into some of the issues I have run into and how we have either solved or are trying to solve the, I will give a list of the ingredients we can pull from when formulating our rations.

Maize Silage @ 35%DM  
Grass Silage @ 51%DM  
Palm Kernel Expeller @ 89%DM  
Tapioca Pellets @ 94%DM  
DDGS @ 90%DM  
Bread Waste @ 68%DM  
Potato Waste @31%DM (correction 9/29/08 50%DM)

...and let's not forget grass at the 2 ½ leaf stage @ 22%DM (correction 9/29/08 24%DM)

Since I have started working on the rations for Ben, I have found out a number of important factors to consider. Measure your dry matter, if that even means using a microwave and not getting it professionally tested. If you are feeding supplement and are counting on an intake of 10kg of potato waste wet at 31%DM but the last shipment contains more broccoli or apples, or the mix is drier at 50%DM it can really affect your actual intake. Intake is the name of the game to maximize your grass uptake and lower the amount of supplement you need to use.

Also, don't underestimate your mineral requirements as I've found. Even if your energy and other nutrition is met, you can still be limiting milk production and wasting money. It is just like having an amino acid deficiency and the whole whiskey barrel analogy.

New Zealand farmers are for the most part not even aware of what the nutritional values are for the supplements they are feeding. Even if they are listed most producers are unaware of what the numbers mean, they do understand increased milk, shiny coats, and condition scores however. This is where the feed companies make their money, working off the fact that most producers are clueless to what they are actually feeding but seeing some results.

This is where I see the ability for real gains in Missouri grazing. We know that you can't graze the whole year strictly on grass. We also know that grass growth is sporadic and nutrition is highly variable as cool/warm season grasses grow. This is where we have the ability to add the

US's wealth of understanding of supplement/TMR feeding. If we can just tailor the technology available in New Zealand for grazing management and the US's ration feeding there would be an opportunity for great profits to be seen.

However, this is all easier said than done. It will take the continued cooperation with an emphasis on coop, between New Zealand farmers and Missouri farmers. There is much to be learned from both if they can just accept that the other may know more about certain things.

New Zealanders have not realized the real benefits to supplement may not be in the milk production but in the ability to keep the cows in condition. Most producers do not like to supplement at all even during the winter in Northland. While it's not a very extreme winter it still stunts the grasses growth. It comes to the point that the cows do not have enough feed in their last trimester of pregnancy. Then as I learned in an InCalf seminar that Ben sent me to, producers blame the grass not growing for their cows being skinny and not getting pregnant again. Hello! Wake up! Look at your management decisions, it is your choice to "save" money by only using grass. If you can't keep the cows in condition with just grass how else are you going to do it, by feeding them hopes and dreams??

## **Anyway, to shift out of my rant...**

It looks like we may be getting the Milfos iDataFlow system. All kinds of new exciting stuff will be added to our arsenal of tools to monitor the cows. We can even tell when the cow is in heat, if she is sick, and how her rumen is functioning. Well, stay tuned till next time for the next installment of THE AMERIKIWI FARMER!