

Higher Forage Feeding Survey Results – Updated (4/5/2017)

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A survey was sent to feed industry professionals to gain insight into their thoughts and observations regarding forage feed levels and practices in dairy herds. An initial email was sent followed by a reminder email. A total of 53 responses were received and are the basis for the information contained in this document.

Question 1 – In the last 10-15 years how has the level of forages fed in the dairy herds you work with changed?

- Stayed the same = 6.78 % of responses.
- Decreased = 1.69 % of responses.
- Increased = 91.52 % of responses.
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Question 2 – One way of expressing the quantity of forage fed is as a % of the total ration dry matter. What % of the herds you work with have the following levels of forage feeding for the high group or the total herd (in a 1 group system)?

% Forage in the Ration	% of Responses
<50	20.3
50 – 60	54.85
60 – 70	31.7
>70	11.86

Question 3 – There are several ways to express the amount of forage in the ration. Which method is the one you prefer to use?

- Pounds or % of forage fed = 51.5 % of responses.
- Forage NDF as % of ration dry matter = 13.7 % of responses.
- Forage NDF as % of total ration NDF = 5.1 % of responses.
- Forage NDF as % of body weight = 6.8 % of responses.
- uNDF as a % of body weight = 5.1 % of responses.
- uNDF as pounds per day = 10.3 % of responses.
- Other answers = 7.45 % of responses (forage as % of ration dry matter)

Question 4 – There is some debate on the forage content of some feeds. What % forage do you assign to the following feeds?

Feed	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Corn silage	82.63	39	100

Whole cottonseed	33.0	0	90
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Question 5 – What is the main reason that you and your producers may be hesitant to feed higher levels of forages in lactating cow ration? (More than 1 answer can be selected).

Reason	% of Responses
Concern about decreasing milk production	39.0
Not sure cows can eat that much feed	6.77
Can't allocate the high-quality forage to the right cows	22.0
Forage quality is not good enough	84.7
Inadequate forage inventory	64.4
Other	3.4

The other reasons listed were:

- Western herds don't have great corn silage.
- Forage is more expensive than non-forage byproduct feeds.

Question 6 – In the herds that have increased the level of forage in the ration, what have been the benefits? (More than 1 answer can be selected).

Benefit	% of Responses
Increased milk production	32.2
Increased milk fat and protein levels	74.5
Lower purchased feed costs	84.7
Improved animal health	76.3
Lower culling rate	20.3
Cows stay in the herd longer	28.8
Improved profitability	76.3

Question 7 – What is the primary forage used in the herds feeding high forage rations?

Forage	% of Responses
Alfalfa silage or hay	8.47
Grass silage or hay	13.55
Mixed legume/grass silage or hay	23.7
Corn silage (conventional)	40.7
Corn silage (BMR)	25.5
Mix of conventional and BMR corn silage	3.7

Question 8 – Feeding higher forage rations requires larger quantities of consistent high quality forages. How have the farms you work with primarily adjusted agronomic and crop management practices to produce the needed quantities of higher quality forages?

Practice	% of Responses
More emphasis on digestibility when selecting forage varieties and corn silage hybrids	25.4
More emphasis on timely harvest and harvest windows	54.2
Better job of storing forages by quality	8.5
Better job of allocating forages to animal groups on a quality basis	3.6
Use wide swathing to decrease drying time	6.8
Use of kernel processing equipment to improve starch digestibility of corn silage	13.6
Use of shredlage equipment to improve digestibility of starch digestibility in corn silage	1.7
Changed equipment to harvest faster	8.5
Switched to using a custom harvester	6.7