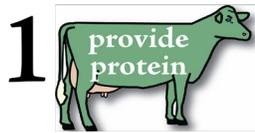


10 Reasons to Make Forages First in the Ration

by Glen Broderick, USDA-ARS, U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center



Provide protein. Legume forages can provide up to 75% of the protein needed by lactating dairy cows; corn silage can provide up to 25%.

Provide fiber. Forages are often the only source of fiber in a cow's diet. Fiber is essential to slow the passage of feed, thereby increasing the amount of nutrients a cow can absorb from the feed.



Maximize intake. Forages stimulate rumination (cud chewing) which improves the cow's appetite. Some non-forage sources of fiber actually reduce intake.

Provide energy. Forages are an important source of energy. Corn silage can provide up to 50% of the energy needed in a cow's diet. Alfalfa silage can provide up to 40%.



Minimize acidosis. Acidosis occurs when excessive VFA production in rumen causes cows to go off feed. Adequate forage and fiber greatly stimulate rumination, buffering acids in the rumen.

Designed for rumen. Cows were designed to eat forages. With their rumens working as fermentation vats, cows turn plants and byproducts that people can't eat into foods they can.



Minimize laminitis. Many times when cows develop acidosis, they also develop laminitis. Adequate fiber in the diet greatly reduces both acidosis and laminitis.



Reduce feed costs. Forages are an economical source of protein, energy and fiber. These nutrients are more expensive when purchased as concentrates.



Good for soil. With their deep roots and permanent ground cover, perennial forages help hold soil in place. They also increase the organic matter in soil, and legumes add nitrogen to the soil.



Sustainable. Perennial forages help protect the environment because they reduce surface water runoff and leaching of nutrients. They require less fertilizer, and they cover the soil year-round.

