

Reasons to feed molasses: Adding the sweetness to buffer feeding



The importance of buffer feeding

- The quality of grass can be quite variable so if cows are only grazing they may be deficient in key nutrients meaning the diet will not be balanced, supplementing a buffer feed into the daily ration will balance the diet nutritionally and help prevent issues with production, health and fertility
- Grass intakes of cattle tend to typically fall on initial turnout and then again as the summer progresses when they don't graze as much in the morning as the grass quality is lower, adding a buffer feed will top up daily fresh weight intakes and prevent a drop off in production
- Buffer feeds help cows to maintain body condition score and fertility which should in turn lead to a lower culling/ herd replacement rate

Why molasses is a key ingredient in a buffer feed

- Molasses is proven to enhance the palatability of a buffer feed mix and improve fresh weight intakes
- Molasses promotes a more even distribution of feed ingredients in a buffer feed whilst reducing ration sorting and waste through its natural sticky properties
- Molasses increases the level of sugars and rapidly fermentable carbohydrates in a buffer diet which is essential for ensuring a good energy supply to the rumen and to stimulate fibre digestion which reduces the risk of acidosis

The reasons why molasses works so well as a buffer feed ingredient



Buffer feeding typically involves feeding relatively small amounts of feeds high in digestible fibre such as big bale silage, straw etc to help improve rumen function and maintain butter fat quality when cows are grazing only. However you still need to add sugars from a feed like molasses to help ferment and break down these more fibrous feeds in the rumen to keep everything working at an optimum level.



For a balanced buffer diet for cattle the target sugar level should be 5 to 7% for good rumen function. Molasses is the perfect ingredient to meet this level as it's primary component is sugars making it rich in rapidly fermentable carbohydrates which help to stimulate volatile fatty acid production in the rumen supporting milk yields and quality.



Cows typically graze more in the afternoon/evening when fresh grass quality is peaking so you could see a performance drop from reduced intakes in the morning when natural grazing levels are down and sugars are typically lower which is why feeding a buffer feed including molasses helps to maintain intakes and prevent a sugar deficit throughout the day.



Grazing only diets risk underfeeding mid-lactation cows and losing between 2 to 3 litres of milk per day which over 150 milking cows could equate to a loss @35ppl of £3,964 per month. Also if cows lose 0.5 BCS in the summer it can take up to 3 months to put it back on in the winter. The aim with a buffer feed is to feed approx. 5 to 10kg each day of the fresh weight that they could lose if grazing only. Including molasses helps to ensure the cattle consume all of this fresh weight by improving the mixing, palatability and presentation of the buffer feed.



The sugars in molasses add a natural sweetness to a buffer feed ration that stimulates the taste receptors in the cow's tongue to voluntarily eat more of the ration.



Typically farms will use winter silage as their initial base forage for a buffer feed during early spring grazing. On average 3rd cut grass silage is typically between 0.3 to 0.5% lower in Sugars (% DM) and 0.4 to 0.6 MJ/kg DM lower in ME than 1st and 2nd cuts so adding molasses via a buffer feed will help to raise both the sugars and energy levels back up to the desired levels in the diet.

For more information about any of United Molasses GB's extensive product range please contact us on 0151 955 4850 or simply visit us at www.unitedmolasses.com.