



## FARM REAPS REWARDS AFTER FEEDING MOLASSES

### Feeding molasses has helped drive feed intakes and milk yield at Backway Farm, Shebbear, in North Devon.

Pete Johns and his sons, Luke and Owen, milk 250 cows twice daily and supply Saputo on a constituent-based contract for Cathedral City Cheddar.

Their all-year-round calving, pedigree Holstein-Friesian Newrock herd averages 11,400 litres at 4.42% butterfat and 3.31% protein from a feed rate of 0.36kg/litre, with 3,000 litres of milk produced from forage.

Cows have been housed full-time for three summers.

*"We are a wet farm, and turnout was often delayed. Grass production could be variable, making grazing management difficult for us, and the cows are far more settled now they are housed on a more consistent ration," says Pete.*

### FEEDING

The cows are fed a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) formulated to meet maintenance requirement plus 30 litres. One diet is fed to the entire herd twice daily, as it is not practical to split the herd into groups.

The current diet comprises 20kg grass silage, 20kg maize silage, 8.5kg of a Harpers Feeds blend, 1kg Regumaize 44 molasses blend, 0.25kg of fat and minerals. Cows are topped up to yield in the parlour with a Harpers 16% protein nut.

The Regumaize is stored in a 12-tonne tank on a loft stand. It is straight forward to reverse the feeder wagon under the tank and add the molasses to the mix, says Pete.

Pete is on his second tank, and the current one is 10 years old.

### IMPROVEMENTS

Pete believes feeding molasses has been beneficial in balancing the ration, driving higher feed intakes, and supporting rumen health and milk yield.

*"While starch drives milk yield, sugars help drive the rumen. Sugars come from grass silage, and as we feed a mix of maize and grass, there was never enough sugar in the diet." He adds: "Increasing sugars has helped support higher intakes and milk yields while being safe for the rumen. Adding molasses and water to the diet has stopped all sorting.*

*Therefore, there is no variable muck or the odd upset cow. In addition, feeding a molassed blend gives a cheaper source of protein than other products like soya."*

Pete believes the molasses blend helps balance out variation in silages and different cuts as the rumen microbes have the energy supply they need.

He has no plans to remove the molasses from the ration. *"We are producing high yields of solids, which is what our contract requires, and I won't risk anything that might affect milk quality."*

Glen Johns, Sales Director at Harpers Feeds, comments: *"When a diet contains 50% maize-silage as its forage proportion, Regumaize 44 fits every time. Maize silage is low in sugar and protein, therefore, Regumaize 44 gives the cow instant sugar from the molasses and Rumen Degradable Protein (RDP) from the regulated release protein."*

*For more information, speak to your Harpers Feed Specialist.*



**Glen Johns**  
Sales Director  
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# FARMING THOUGHTS

**Favourable weather has helped most farms secure sufficient winter forage supplies. For those still short, competitively priced straights such as barley can help extend stocks.**

With milk prices under pressure, the focus must now shift to maximising milk from forage and improving feed efficiency. When B litres were worth 50–60ppl, pushing yields made sense. Now, farmers must carefully consider whether feeding for B litres is economical. Remember, cows don't know the milk price – their energy requirements must still be met.

Get forage tested, balance the base ration, and challenge cows that are back in calf. If you're not already doing so, start regular dairy costings so your Feed Specialist can monitor feed rates.

We've secured storage on the Devon–Cornwall border, enabling us to stock raw materials and supply straights competitively.

Look out for the invitation to our annual sheep meetings in November and January – they are always an informative evening.



# BEEF INDUSTRY

**With cattle trade looking firm, now is the time to plan rations to maximise growth and achieve efficient finishing. Speak to your Feed Specialist about analysing forage and formulating bespoke rations.**

As I approach my 70th birthday, I will continue my role as director but in a reduced capacity. The business is in great shape, offering a more comprehensive package than ever, and I remain committed to upholding our founding principles.

Thank you for your continued support and friendship.

While I look forward to spending more time at home with my wife and on the farm, I'm still available if you need me.

I will also be serving another term as Chairman of the National Beef Association (NBA) Southwest Region. If you have issues around legislation or competition, please get in touch.

Through our Chief Executive, Neil Shand, we have strong access to government and industry figures. If you are an NBA member and would like to help on our SW Council, please contact me. If not, please join! Your voice must be heard, and this is the most direct way of making a difference.



## RAW MATERIAL UPDATE

**The UK is predicted to produce an 11.6–12.2 million tonne (MT) wheat crop, slightly down on previous estimates.**

DEFRA recently amended UK wheat stocks, lowering them by 35% on the year, leaving wheat availability not as healthy as originally expected. Yields have been very variable across the country, with the South West coming out favourably for yields and quality, having received rain at the right time.

Cereals continue to trade at similar levels to last year. Cereals remain the best value. However, growers are reluctant sellers, which is causing premiums when buying forward due to more buyers than sellers.

We are likely to be a net importer of cereals again this year.

Demand is also likely to be down with the closure of UK ethanol plants, which used around 1 MT of wheat. Globally, the main wheat-exporting countries have produced 31MT more than last year, meaning there is plenty available for import.

Protein prices have eased with plentiful supplies of soya and rapeseed meal. World soya bean supply is 27MT up on last year at 426MT. China has put tariffs on Canadian canola meal, which has left more available, pressuring prices. The focus is on whether the US strike a deal with China. China is in no hurry as it has plentiful supplies of soya, but a deal could firm up the market.

This is because the dollar is likely to strengthen and demand for soya will increase.

Soya hulls are trading over £200/tonne, significantly above last year, and products like wheatfeed and wheat gluten are in short supply as many farmers are using them as forage replacers.

Fibres are proving to be very difficult with a small sugar beet crop in the UK. Currently, there are limited home-grown and imported volumes available. Let's hope the recent rain might bolster supplies.





# PLAN WINTER RATIONS IN EARNEST AND BOOK FEED PROMPTLY

## I am going to start with a massive positive here in the Southwest – we have got forage!

Never have I known such variance in silage quantity made from county to county – some clients are on sixth cut while others are still trying to make second and third – but overall, quality is reasonable (see table below).

In short, we have safe silages that may require a little “fizz” to really fire. Energy is reasonable, but only two samples reached 12 ME, a trend echoed nationally. Protein is better than previous years, though some early-cut grass yielded poorly for protein, which may be skewing the data. Many second cuts are still being tested, but our initial samples indicate a similar picture.

Generally, silages will be stable in the clamp. However, remember that high dry matter plus residual sugar increases the risk of heating, which can create a perfect environment for undesirable bugs. Early warning signs include the odd cow going off feed, loose dung, followed by the recovery of appetite and milk within 48-60 hours.

## FEEDING STRATEGIES FOR THE WINTER

So, what should we be feeding this winter? We are most definitely going to need a high-starch inclusion ration to get the most out of the diet. The **Harpers Glycogenic range** is best suited to the task, offering Levucell yeast as standard to help maintain a healthy rumen population. It remains soya-free, ticking the sustainability box for Arla.

Listening to customer feedback, and their want for sustainable soya to be included in our offering, **Harpers Max Pro range** and **Buttermax ranges** will include North American soya this winter. Max Pro blends high-starch sources and soya to provide a slightly higher ME than Glycogenic, while Buttermax offers highly digestible fibre for those looking to complement maize diets.

For those with diet feeders and tanks, molasses does hit the spot. It can be purchased with bonded urea to supply protein or used to improve fermentation and palatability, particularly if you have high dry matter silages.

I know I've said this before, but to recap, we are looking for two parts starch to one part sugar. We need 6% sugar to create good fermentation and balance starch.

Keep the total mixed ration (TMR) around 40% dry matter, either by adding water to the premix or directly to the silage in the wagon. Be aware that dry matter can fluctuate dramatically – I have seen clamp face samples shift by 7% in 24 hours during wet spells. This makes the lives of feeders very challenging. Routine silage analysis is therefore essential this winter.

## MARKET OUTLOOK AND BUYING FORWARD

Looking at the markets, I don't believe there has been a better time to cover feed for the coming months. Rape and soya are both in the £200/tonne bracket; a level I haven't seen for many years. Corn is also good value, but fibres such as sugar beet and soya hulls remain expensive. It's a good thing we don't require them this winter.

Many in the industry are talking the milk price down, but we have been here before. I love Glen's saying: “The cow doesn't know what the milk price is!” It is true. Focus on what you can control – book your feed, the bottom is here, but it can go up! Get cows safely back in calf, then you can pull back feed if the downturn hits. Know how much milk you are contracted to supply and fulfil these obligations.

Look at the cows in the shed carefully – make sure you do not carry any passengers into the winter. The beef price is good, so there is no excuse for keeping unproductive cows.

As ever, the Harpers team is on hand to plan and guide you through these choppy waters, so please don't hesitate to get in touch.



**Richard Waters**  
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Source	DM %	Crude Protein %	D Value %	ME (MJ per KG of DM)	RFC G/KGDM	TFC G/KGDM
Harpers 2025 1st cut	37.10 (23-64 range)	13.54 (8.24- 20.78 range)	69.91 (58- 75.58 range)	11.14 (9.29- 12.10 range)	199.05 (135- 257 range)	455.06 (324- 581 range)
Trouw 2025 1st cut	36.33	14.33	67.50	10.8	193.36	456.49
Trouw 2024 1st cut	34.04	13.81	66.72	10.68	189.14	435.35

# ADVICE ON FEEDING EWES TO BOOST FERTILITY

**The nutrition of the ewe is crucial to achieve an optimal body condition score (BCS) at tupping. This ensures high levels of fertility and a greater lamb crop next season. It can take up to six weeks to increase BCS by one point; therefore, it is important to assess flock condition early and act quickly.**

Most lowland ewes should have a BCS of 3.5 at tupping, upland ewes 3, and hill ewes 2.5. However, the recent dry weather and limited grazing mean that many ewes are below targets and will need supplementing before tupping to ensure lambing percentages are not affected.

Separating thin ewes with a BCS of 2 – 2.5 and feeding them to improve body condition will increase ovulation rates and lead to improved fertility and overall lambing percentages. Thin ewes will need at least 0.5kg of high-energy feed per day for one month to raise their BCS by one point. The cost of feeding for a short period now will pay dividends throughout the season.

The use of **Harpers 18% Super Ewe Range** alongside **Harpers High-Energy feed buckets** will get your ewes off to the best possible start. Together, they will provide ewes with optimum levels of quality protein and energy, as well as the necessary vitamins and trace elements.

Don't forget the rams! The period 10-12 weeks before tupping is when rams require most attention to ensure they are fit for breeding. This can be done by conducting a ram 'MOT' which examines the five T's: toes, teeth, testicles, tone and treat. This allows time for any problems to be rectified before rams start work.

Usually, healthy adult ewes carry a very low worm burden as their acquired immunity doesn't allow many adult worms to remain in the gut. However, with many ewes being under-conditioned, there is a potential risk of worm burdens.

Alongside this, immature sheep being mated for the first time may require closer attention. Ensure you use Faecal Egg Counts (FECs) to determine if treatment is necessary.

The dry summer has also resulted in high levels of *Haemonchus Contortus* (Barber's Pole worm). This is a blood-sucking roundworm that lives in the abomasum of the sheep. Common signs are anaemia, lethargy, and "bottle jaw", but not scours, which is a key difference from other worm infections. It can quickly become fatal for both ewes and lambs if left untreated, as sheep cannot build immunity against this worm and the shedding of up to 15,000 eggs a day means pastures soon become heavily infected.

**For more information on the Harpers Sheep Feed Range, pre-tupping and lambing advice, speak to your local Feed Specialist.**



**Myles Jones**  
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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

We look forward to seeing you at events throughout the rest of the year. Make sure to pop in and see us.

EVENT	DATE	LOCATION
<b>The Dairy Show</b>	Wednesday 1st October	Bath & West Showground, Shepton Mallet. BA4 6QN
<b>Launceston VS Brixham Rugby</b> <b>BOOKING REQUIRED</b>	Saturday 25th October	Launceston Rugby Club, PL15 9QT
<b>AgriFest</b>	Wednesday 5th November	Westpoint, Exeter, EX5 1DJ
<b>Helston Fatstock Show</b>	Saturday 8th November	Franchis Farm, Helston, TR13 0LT