



DON'T DO THINGS THE WAY YOU HAVE ALWAYS DONE THEM

As we enter spring 2024, we face unprecedented challenges in the agricultural industry. This is a stark reminder that no two years are the same, as I said back in 2021. The year has been marked by incessant rain, which has resulted in the wettest February since the 1300s.

Forage stocks have been depleted to an alarming level, and it is challenging to access grass to feed the animals. Farmers have been unable to spread slurry due to the waterlogged fields. The corn has been washed away or is still in the bag. Standing water in fields has become a common sight. The question that looms large is when will this end? And, even if it does, will it start again?

Unfortunately, I do not have the answer to these questions. However, farmers need to make the most of what is in front of them and be as creative as possible. This year, farmers cannot afford to do things the same way we always have.

Grass growth has become excessive, making it difficult to spread slurry or fertilise the fields.

As discussed at our recent Forage events, take what is available and bale it up quickly, even if it is just the driest field. This will create space for the slurry to go.

Fertiliser is now the cheapest source of protein and should not be compromised. The rain has leached out a considerable amount of nutrients from the ground, so the good old-fashioned "two units per day" (utilised by the plant from applied fertiliser to cutting) may be nearer to three units this year. Cut earlier, if the ground conditions permit, but it will be vital to test nitrate levels first.

If it is practical, cut more acres now and potentially aim for a second cut at the end of May, if grass regrowth is good. This may help to offset the loss in tonnes. Pre-mowing some grass (if you can) will help set the wedge, but we must not cut grass too low. The clean cut will allow quicker regrowth and better grass utilisation.

On-off grazing is being implemented where possible. Studies have shown that cows can take up to 80% of their daily grass intake in two-to-three-hour grazing sessions each end of the day.

Cows should then be taken off the field and stand on a yard, track, or be put back in the shed. If silage is still available, a small buffer will help keep the cow's rumens right.

If slurry needs to be applied, we must avoid spreading it on heavy grass growth. Take the higher-level water content off the top of your slurry lagoon, where there is least sediment and spread it over more acres. Even though this will incur a higher cost in diesel, we don't want contaminated silage crop. If you can, inject the slurry or use a dribble bar.

When it comes to supplementary feeding, the raw material market is on our side. Spring and summer diets, particularly starchy diets, are good value. First-round grazing will require higher supplemental energy and glucose. We must not contemplate dropping protein as we turn cows out to grass or this will act as a double hit to your animals.

Looking ahead to the second grazing round, we can then opt for a lower-protein feed and benefit from the cost savings. Novatan is a tried and tested product that can help utilise more of the excess proteins available in the grass. This, in turn, reduces the cow's energy requirements to get rid of it through saliva, urine and milk urea.

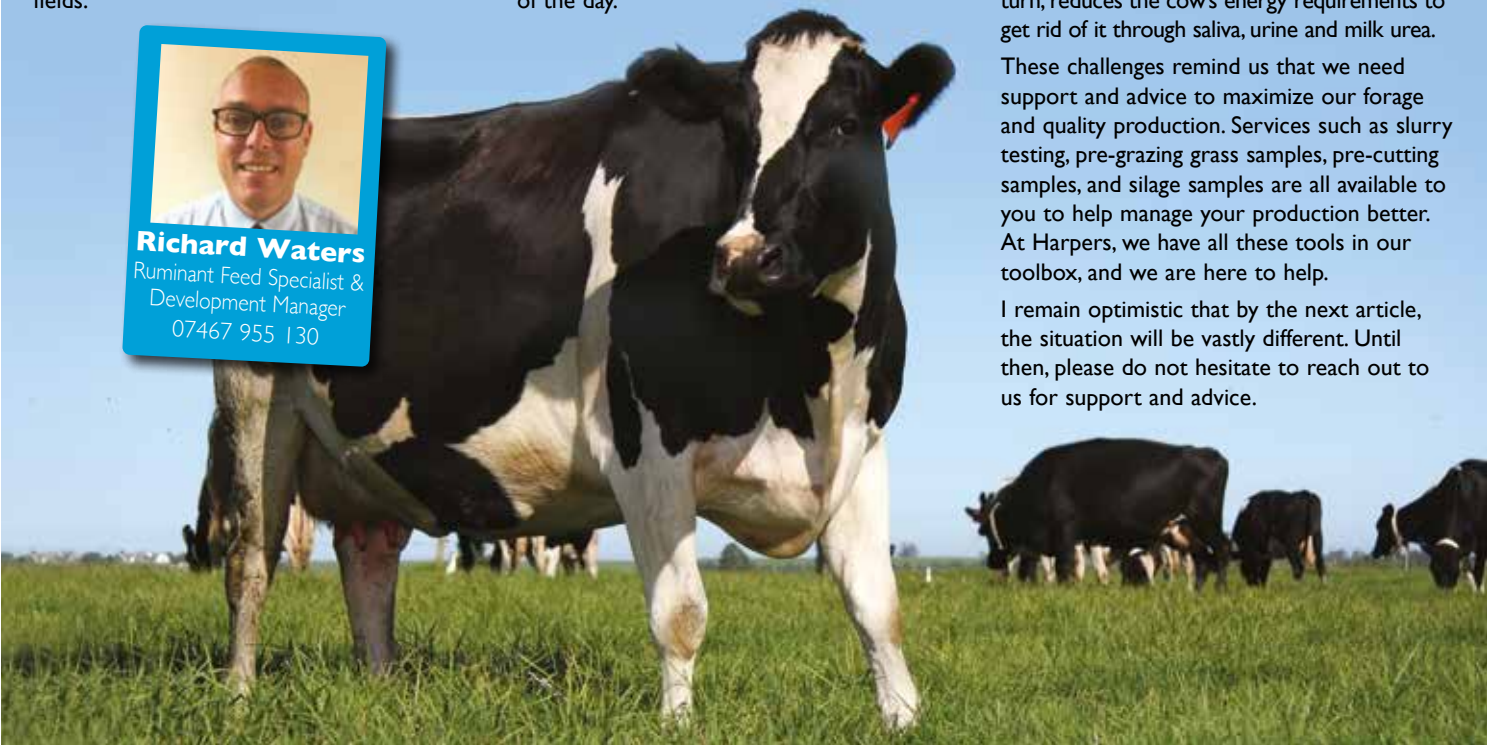
These challenges remind us that we need support and advice to maximize our forage and quality production. Services such as slurry testing, pre-grazing grass samples, pre-cutting samples, and silage samples are all available to you to help manage your production better. At Harpers, we have all these tools in our toolbox, and we are here to help.

I remain optimistic that by the next article, the situation will be vastly different. Until then, please do not hesitate to reach out to us for support and advice.



Richard Waters

Ruminant Feed Specialist &
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Farming thoughts

Thank you to everyone who attended our recent silage harvesting meetings. We were thrilled to have had over 250 farmers in attendance to listen to our four expert speakers. If you could not attend, please read the highlights provided by Alex Cornish across the page.

Weather patterns worldwide are having a major impact on raw material prices. Currently, wheat and cereal prices are trading below the cost of production. We have been buying forward right through to next year. This is probably the earliest we have ever come out with forward prices, and you can contract until this time next year.

With beef and lamb prices at an all-time high, I would advise to take some cover. Forward-buying could also help dairy farmers reduce bought-in feed costs to 10ppl, which is well worth it.

Our Feed Specialists can provide you with contract prices.



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GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS

In the last couple of weeks, we have seen increased volatility in the grain market. Europe is likely to impose a €95 tariff on grain from Russia, even though it only makes up less than 4% of EU imports, Russia is predicted to produce a large crop of 94 million tonnes of wheat. The EU continues to campaign for restrictions on cheap Ukrainian grain flooding EU markets.

On UK soil, AHDB has predicted the wheat area will be down 15%, to 1,463,000 hectares and could produce a crop range of 10-11.8 million tonnes, down from 14 million tonnes last year. Winter barley is also predicted to be down 22%, but spring barley 29% up. All these factors point to higher prices. However, we will have high carryover stocks from this year as we have been uncompetitive on exports. Large quantities of grain maize available globally also prevent wheat prices from increasing. Grain maize does look like a good option as a starch source for next winter.

Currently, with growers looking at poor crops, they are reluctant sellers, both on the old and new crop. If they do sell, they are looking for high premiums. With November wheat currently around £195 ex-farm and old crop trading for a £20 discount, growers will likely carry wheat into next season. The gap between barley and wheat remains £10 to £15 per tonne and old crop supplies are very tight, particularly in the South West.

Rape meal values have firmed but have become uncompetitive against other protein sources such as soya, sunflower and distillers. With soya remaining around £100 per tonne cheaper than last

year, it would be prudent to have some cover on soya until Christmas.

For more information, call the office on 01409 254 300.



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FINISHING YOUR CATTLE EFFECTIVELY

Now is the time to decide whether to keep finished cattle indoors or turn them out to grass.

It is advisable to keep cattle indoors if they can reach the desired finishing weight by the end of June. Any cattle weighing over 500kgs should continue to be finished indoors, with daily liveweight gains of 1.3-1.5 kgs/day targeted until the end of June.

To ensure these growth rates are achieved, it is necessary to thoroughly examine rations.

If the cattle are passing partially digested food, check the diet is correctly balanced and free from mycotoxins caused by mouldy forages. If there are any concerns, the diet can be re-run and the mycotoxin binder Taxisorb can be added to eliminate the effects of mould. It also contains yeast to aid cereal digestion.

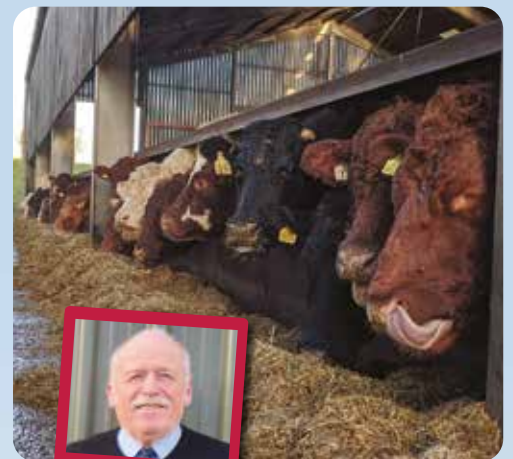
It is also essential to examine the water troughs to ensure you are providing clean drinking water.

To optimise the cattle's growth rate, they need to consume around 10% of their body weight in water each day. Cleaning troughs can help drive water intake.

The feed conversion efficiency of cattle increases with the temperature. To maximise profits, it is necessary to monitor the performance of cattle by weighing animals regularly.

Evaluating cattle diets, maintaining good hygiene, checking water quality, and examining forages, are all factors that can lead to faster growth and higher profits.

If any issues arise, contact your Feed Specialist for assistance.



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COST-EFFECTIVE TIPS FOR REARING LAMBS

Meeting the nutritional needs of lambs whilst keeping costs low can often seem like a tricky balancing act.

Lambs need a well-rounded diet that includes proteins, carbohydrates, fibres along with essential vitamins and minerals. The proportion of each component in their feed will vary based on the lamb's age, weight, and overall health. This underlines the importance of investing in high-quality feeds, such as Harpers Lamb Start 2 Finish Pellets, that are tailored to meet these specific needs.

Providing the right nutrients not only staves off health issues but also boosts productivity, leading to a higher return on your investment. Over time, this will help you save a lot on animal health expenses. It's about investing smartly today for a healthier, more profitable tomorrow.

Sticking to a strict feeding timetable is essential. This ensures consistency and prevents unnecessary wastage and overfeeding. Harpers Lamb Finisher Nuts are an ideal diet to feed indoors or outdoors, depending on your feeding system.

Finally, don't overlook the importance of water. Without sufficient hydration, lambs can become lethargic and more prone to disease. Ensuring your flock has constant access to clean and fresh water is vital. It not only helps maintain their overall health, but it also plays a significant role in the digestion process and nutrient uptake, optimising the nutritional benefits of their diet. This simple, cost-effective step of providing plentiful water can significantly enhance the health of your lambs. It's about quenching their thirst and fuelling their nutritional needs at the same time.



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Speak to your Harpers Feeds Specialist to discuss your lamb creep requirements and maximise the growth potential of your lamb crop through our tried and tested range of feeds.

ADVICE FOR MAKING QUALITY FIRST-CUT SILAGE

Although the weather has been miserable over the past few months, hopefully, we have some good weather on the way that will allow farmers to make good-quality first-cut silage.

The main area of focus discussed at our recent silage meetings was 'Planning Ahead'. Firstly, grass seeding and fertiliser applications need to be considered. Herbal leys will affect silage fermentation and bring its own challenges. Having a mixture of grasses, legumes and herbs will mean variable heading dates compared to a traditional cutting ley. Careful work with your agronomist is needed to get the best cutting/grazing mix for your farm.

In many cases, fertiliser applications have been later than planned. If you are aiming for the same harvest date, it is worth reconsidering the level of nitrogen being applied. This year, it is going to be crucial to check nitrate levels in the swards (see p4 for advice).

Speak to your contractors so they understand your requirements for the coming season.

In some situations, fields have been churned up when spreading slurry. Therefore, you need to consider increasing the cutting height to reduce soil contamination. Cutting the fields to ensure grass leys still holding some colour (not white after harvest) will encourage quicker recovery and grass growth.

Chop length is dry matter dependent (see table 1: Chop length).

TABLE 1: CHOP LENGTH

Dry Matter %	Chop Length
Sub < 22	10 cm
22 - 28	8 cm
28 - 32	2.5 - 5 cm
32 - 37	2.5 cm
> 37	1 - 2 cm

To achieve the best fermentation possible, you need a suitable weight of machinery on the pit to keep consolidation consistent throughout the filling process.

This will help achieve consistent density throughout the clamp and prevent silage slippage.

Side and top sheets are essential to prevent wastage over the shoulders of the clamp, but they must be well-weighted. Placing gravel bags along the perimeter of the clamp can prevent air seepage.

Lastly, to get the best results, an effective inoculant needs to be applied. Lallemand's 'Magniva' range of products contains multiple strains of bacteria to:

- ✓ Rapidly lower pH
- ✓ Increase aerobic stability.
- ✓ Reduce waste and increase energy content.

For more information on how Magniva performed in recent trials, read p4 overleaf. If you have any questions, please contact your Feed Specialist.



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INOCULANT INCREASES FCM MILK YIELDS BY 1.9KG/DAY, TRIAL SHOWS

Using an inoculant on grass silage can improve clamp stability, increase feedable dry matter by 29% and improve fat-corrected milk yields by 1.9 kg/day, a trial at Reading University has found.

Half the crop of grass silage (28% dry matter) harvested in April was treated with Lallemand Animal Nutrition's Magniva Platinum Grass Dry and the other half was left untreated.

The trial assessed how the inoculant impacted fermentation and cow performance.

For 12 weeks, core samples were taken weekly from the face of each 75t clamp and temperature changes were analysed.

USING INOCULANT GIVES A GOOD RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The trial shows that with the increased feedable dry matter and energy available in the treated forage, as well as improved dry matter intakes and milk yields, producers will see a good return on investment if they use an inoculant when making grass silage.

For more information, speak to your Harpers Feeds Specialist.

Reference: Lallemand Animal Nutrition

RESULTS SHOWED

- **The inoculant reduced dry matter losses by 29%** resulting in more feed available for the cows. In comparison, the untreated clamp shrunk considerably after 100 days of being ensiled. The difference equated to 21,781kg of silage.
- The treated silage had superior lactic, acetic and propane diol acid profiles and it had 10 times less butyric acid.
- The lower butyric acid indicates that clostridia, the bacteria that break down protein and cause foul-smelling silage, were effectively inhibited.
- **This resulted in a more palatable silage** with the group of cows that were fed treated silage in their ration achieving higher dry matter intakes of 1.5kg/day compared to the control group.
- **This correlated with an increase in fat-corrected milk** of 1.9kg/day. A 0.1% improvement in protein and 0.19% increase in fat was seen when comparing treatment and control group cows.
- Aerobic stability was also improved in the treated silage. This resulted in less heating in the clamp – the control clamp temperatures peaked at 34.6°C, whereas the treated silage reached only 26.7°C – a significant difference in energy terms.
- This extra 8°C of heating in the control group is the equivalent of losing 28MJ of energy for every tonne of silage fresh weight that is unstable. This equates to 5.4kg of milk lost.

Pre-cut testing of grass is an important tool to improve forage quality and the stability of fermentation in the clamp.

Excess nitrogen will depress grass sugars and increase the protein level of the crop, causing poor fermentation.

By cutting grass at the optimum time, you can ensure better quality, higher-energy forage.

At Harpers, your Feed Specialist can carry out free nitrate testing to indicate nitrate levels from bagged fertiliser or dung/ farmyard manure.

Ideally, nitrates should be at 1000mg/kg or below. If levels are above 2500mg/kg, cutting should be delayed.

Allow uptake of nitrates by the plant of 2 units per day.



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

MANDATORY BIRD REGISTRATION

New mandatory registration requirements are to be implemented for bird keepers in Great Britain. **Keepers need to follow these new requirements by 1 October 2024.** **Scottish keepers need to follow these new requirements by 1 September 2024.**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Event	Date	Location
Saturday 6th April	Bude VS Bideford sponsored rugby game	Bude RFC, EX23 8QG, KO: 3.00pm
Tuesday 7th & Wednesday 8th May	Dorset Horn & Pull Dorset May Fair	Exeter Livestock Market
Monday 6th May	Bank Holiday	
Thursday 16th – Saturday 18th May	Devon County Show	Westpoint, Exeter
Monday 27th May	Bank Holiday	