

What is the Value of Grass Silage?

by Trish Lewis, Cundy Technical Services

When I first came to New Zealand from UK eight years ago, I was surprised to find that silage inoculant technology was far more readily accepted by farmers here for maize silage than for grass silage, and wondered why.

In Europe and USA, inoculants are widely used on grass silage too, because it has a high buffering capacity (resistance to a drop in pH) and is prone to clostridial spoilage. Grass cut early or late in the season also has lower sugar levels, so there is less fuel to drive a good fermentation. This is why the fermentation quality of grass silage is more variable and there is a greater benefit from using an inoculant.

However, I've now come to the conclusion that the answer has nothing to do with fermentation characteristics and everything to do with value. If you pay 20 cents per kg dry matter for the maize crop you buy in and ensile, then that silage instantly has a perceived value of at least 20 cents. If you have a good grass growing season, the grass gets ahead of you so you shut a few paddocks up and make a stack of grass silage, what is that silage worth? Nothing really because that grass was going spare? **WRONG!**

The value of grass silage in the stack should be based on the potential it has to produce milk, not on what it cost to make. A good quality grass silage with an ME of 11 MJ/kgDM and crude protein content of 16% on a dry matter basis has every bit as much potential milk producing value as a stack of maize silage, particularly in the summer when pasture protein levels are low. So surely its value must be the same as the maize silage you paid 20+ cents for!

Kevin Macdonald and his team at Dexcel published the results of a trial looking at the response in extra milk solids to feeding grass silage of different nutritional qualities. As well as showing the financial benefits of cutting grass at a less mature stage to make higher energy grass silage, this trial showed the value of good quality grass silage as a potential milk producer.

There is plenty of scientific research to show that a good silage inoculant, such as **Sil-All**[®] from **Nutritech**, can reduce dry matter losses and improve the nutritional value of grass silage, resulting in more milk produced per tonne of grass cut. Even at today's payout, the value of the response will exceed the money spent on **Sil-All** by at least 3 to 1.

So if you have dutifully used an inoculant when ensiling maize silage but not put it on your grass silage because you think it's not worth the cost, it's time to think again.

For further information on making quality grass silage or using inoculants, contact **Trish Lewis** on **0800 822322** or trish@cundytec.co.nz