

## NEWS RELEASE

**SCOTT GUNDERSON  
MANITOWOC COUNTY UW-EXTENSION DAIRY AGENT  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION**

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### **Feeding Strategies When Alfalfa is in Short Supply**

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Severe alfalfa winter kill, along with drought-like conditions in eastern Wisconsin have led to numerous concerns about extending forage. The first step is to take an inventory of forages that are in storage (corn silage, alfalfa silage, hay, etc.) and normal planned purchases (western hay) for comparison with forage needs. Remember to include an estimate for feeding losses and refusals into the calculation of forage needs (10 percent is a reasonable default value).

The UW-Extension Forage Team has an article that may be of assistance authored by Dr. Brian Holmes entitled, "Making a Forage Inventory."

From the standpoint of cow health and productivity, it is usually better if possible to stretch alfalfa to last longer by feeding lesser amounts than to eliminate it totally from diets. A small negative differential between alfalfa inventory and needs for the summer feeding period may simply mean increasing the proportion of corn silage to alfalfa forage in diets for replacement heifers, milking cows or both and (or) minimizing feeding losses and refusals. A moderate to large negative differential between alfalfa inventory and needs for the summer feeding period will necessitate consideration of more drastic measures depending on the severity of the situation (feeding lower forage diets, purchasing and feeding higher amounts of high-fiber byproducts, purchasing and feeding higher amounts of hay, or feeding straw), according to UW-Extension Nutritionist Dr. Randy Shaver. Diet changes aimed at stretching forage supplies should be done under the supervision of a ration consultant.

Low levels of alfalfa and other forages will require some farmers to consider increasing the level of high-fiber byproduct feeds.

Farmers and ration advisors are reminded that the Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF) of high-fiber byproducts is not as effective as the NDF from forage for the maintenance of normal milk fat test. The exception to this is whole cottonseed where the NDF effectiveness relative to alfalfa haylage is near 100 percent.

The table below indicates the suggested upper feeding limits for some high-fiber by-product feeds. The limits are in pounds of dry matter per cow per day.

<b>Suggested feeding limits for selected high-fiber byproducts.</b>	
<b>Ingredient</b>	<b>Suggested Limits lb. DM per cow per day</b>
Alfalfa Meal	5 – 10
Beet Pulp	8 – 12
Brewers Grain	5 – 10
Canola Meal	5 – 10
Citrus Pulp	5 – 10
Corn Gluten Feed	10 – 15
Cottonseed Hulls	5 – 10
Cottonseed Meal	5 – 10
Distillers Grains	5 – 10
Hominy	10 – 15
Linseed Meal	5 – 10
Malt Sprouts	5 – 10
Soybean Hulls	8 – 12
Sunflower Meal	5 – 10
Wheat Middlings	8 – 12
Whole Cottonseed	5 – 8

The feeding limits were adapted from information published by former UW-Extension Dairy Nutritionist Dr. Terry Howard. Actual amounts fed should be determined by ration formulation for specific groups of dairy animals.

Where possible, some dairy producers are increasing the level of corn silage in the diet in order to extend alfalfa haylage. Adding high-fiber byproducts to high corn silage diets will help to reduce the non-fiber carbohydrate fraction of the diet. UW-Extension nutritionists recommend that corn silage be limited to 75 percent of the forage dry matter with the other 25 percent of the forage being comprised of coarse-chopped forage. Adding whole cottonseed is also recommended when corn silage makes up more than 50 percent of the forage dry matter.

For additional information on methods to extend alfalfa, contact your ration consultant or the Manitowoc County UW-Extension office.

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