



CO. DURHAM DAIRY FARMER WON'T RUN OUT OF ACTISAF AGAIN!

David Walker milks a herd of 100 dairy cows at High Woodfield Farm in County Durham. His all-year-round calving herd averages 10,500 litres with 3.35% protein and 4.12% butterfats, and they are fed a TMR ration of grass silage, wholecrop, soya meal and barley.

David began using Actisaf in 2012 on the recommendation of his nutritionist as he was worried about herd performance.

"Back in 2012, I was concerned that cows weren't performing as they should be and took advice from a number of people. Our nutritionist suggested that our high quality home-grown forage might be leading to sub-acute rumen acidosis and recommended we add Actisaf live yeast to the ration to address this."

When Actisaf was added alongside some tweaks to the diet, the improvement was very fast and David saw that cudging improved and cows seemed more content. Milk yield also responded significantly.

This positive impact from Actisaf was reinforced for David when he inadvertently ran out of Actisaf farm pack for a few days and saw an immediate effect on the herd. "The cows just crashed. Yields went down by 2-3 litres/cow/day and were only restored when we put the Actisaf back in. That gave me confidence that it was having a big effect," David explained.

Six years later, Actisaf still has a permanent place in the milking herd diet, fed as part of a farm pack. In fact, David is so confident in the difference that it makes that in the last year he has also made it part of his bull's diet, to help with acidosis and to improve their growth performance. "We saw such good results with our cows that it made sense to give it to our bulls as well in their TMR at the recommended rate," said David.

"I have tried a lot of the yeast products on the market, and Actisaf is by the far the best out there, so I have stuck with it. I have made sure that I never run out again and it will stay as a part of our herd's diet for the foreseeable future!"

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PREPARING FOR WINTER...



Across the UK and Republic of Ireland, this year's weather conditions have left a lot of farmers scratching their heads when it comes to feeding forage this winter. While some regions have been fortunate enough to have sufficient amounts of good quality feed options, others have been left with a mixed or inconsistent supply, putting rumen function and production performance at risk. Technical Manager for Phileo Lesaffre Animal Care in the UK & Ireland and CowSignals® Master Trainer, James Ambrose, outlines some useful tips for management and nutrition going into this winter season.

The drought this summer has left some parts of the UK and Ireland with low supplies and variable qualities of forage going into winter. With straw being very expensive and digestible fibres hard to source as well, this means that many winter diets will contain higher than usual levels of concentrate to maintain the performance of herds. This may also mean that some compounds will need to be reformulated to incorporate more maize and cereals into blends.

All of these factors mean increased cost of production in areas where forage is in short supply on farms, but also there is a heightened risk of poor rumen function and, potentially, acidosis as a result.

It is important to remember that when feeding a cow, we are really feeding the bugs within the rumen, which in turn feed the cow. Ruminal microbes supply approximately 80% of the energy requirements and 65% of the metabolisable protein requirements of the cow. Feeding these bugs a balanced diet and creating the right environment in the rumen for them to grow and thrive optimises their ability to digest what the cow is fed, which is essential for optimal rumen function.

Variable and excessively high concentrate diets, or diets that are not properly balanced, will cause disruption to the rumen microbe population, thereby affecting performance, so it is especially important this winter to monitor your herd and their rumen function.

Here are a few basic CowSignals® to look out for that can tell you how your cows are feeling:

Lying down vs. standing in cubicles



Ideally, a cow should lie down for 8-10 hours a day. This allows her to rest her feet, increase blood flow to the udder and digest feed more thoroughly. If you notice that cows are standing too much, or standing half in and half out of cubicles (as shown above), then this suggests that cows are not comfortable lying down or have lameness. Check your cubicle dimensions and the surface of the bed and bedding material to see if the bed provides sufficient space for the cow to lie down comfortably and check cows for leg and foot problems.



Dung consistency



The consistency of a cow's dung is a good indicator of her general health. Loose, bubbly dung (pictured) is a sign of the onset of reduced rumen function and/or acidosis. This should be addressed immediately to minimise a reduction in performance.

Other CowSignals® to monitor:

Other warning signs include poor rumen fill and empty looking cows, cud balls in collecting yards, poor cudging rates, and cows losing body condition.

REMEMBER...

- Actisaf is the only live yeast scientifically proven to reduce lactic acid levels in the rumen (which accumulates and causes acidosis), and published research in the *Journal of Dairy Science* has shown it to lower lactic acid levels to a greater extent than sodium bicarbonate. It also increases fibre digestion in the rumen, unlocking more energy from silages and increasing herd performance.
- Actisaf live yeast can be included in your compound feed, blends and coarse ration by your local feed mill or, for farmers using diet feeders, it can be included via 25kg farm pack.

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Top tips for surviving the winter:

- Measure and test forage throughout the winter, at least on a monthly basis.
- Where forage is in short supply, ensure a minimum of 40% forage in the diet – this will require a very high level of feeding management and oversight.
- NDF content of the overall diet should not drop below 30%-32%, with 23%-25% of this coming from forage.
- On particularly leafy and digestible silages, structural fibre from straw or lucerne will be very important.
- When changing raw materials or forages in the diet, do so gradually over a period of 3 weeks to allow the rumen bugs to adapt and avoid a drop in cow performance.
- Where possible, mix different cuts of forages on the farm into the diet from the start of the winter to provide a more consistent ration.
- In cases where food industry waste or by-products are fed, try to ensure a contracted supply for the winter, again to ensure feed consistency.

Silage pit management:

- Use a shear grab and keep a shear face to the clamp to minimise air ingress. Loose, spoiled silage around the clamp face should not be fed to milking cows.
- Aim to get across the pit face in less than two days and move the sheets back appropriately – don't expose too much of the clamp in one go.



Feeder wagon mixing:

- Load in the correct order – usually forages first.
- Don't overfill the feeder – it won't mix properly. This will result in forage and concentrate being unevenly distributed at the feed fence, leading to variable milk yields, as some cows will eat more concentrate than forage.
- Don't over mix the feed – ideally feed needs to be 2-4 inches long (the width of the cow's muzzle) for good rumination.
- The TMR dry matter should be about 45%-48% DM to avoid sorting and maximise DMI. For very dry forages, water may need to be added. This is critical to get smaller particles of concentrate to stick to forage and minimise sorting.
- Where drier silage is being fed, there may be a heightened risk of the silage heating in the TMR/PMR. This may require the feeding of a TMR stabiliser within the mix.
- Where silage is heated, there may also be a risk of developing mycotoxins. In such cases, feed Safwall to protect gut function in their presence.





ACTISAF IMPROVES HERD PERFORMANCE

The benefits of adding Actisaf to dairy herd feed rations have been well documented, specifically related to improvements in rumen performance and function. But one dairy farmer in Co Monaghan, Ireland, is convinced that it has also delivered other benefits, as his herd's fertility has been excellent since making Actisaf a regular part of cows' diets.

Trevor Williamson of Drum Shamny Farm milks 80 red and white Holstein cows, with an average yield of 8,000 litres, and some cows peaking at 60 litres per day.

The herd grazes across 180 acres over the summer months and is typically fed around 7kg per head of compound feed a day during the grazing season. Over the winter, compound feed is increased to about 8kg /head/day in addition to plentiful home-grown grass silage. Actisaf is included in feed at 2 kg per tonne, supplied by Leslie Quinn from nearby Corby Rock Mill.

"We decided to add Actisaf in 2014 after an incidence of acidosis, indicated by a sudden drop in butterfat levels, and saw instant improvements and have not had any issues since. We've also seen great improvements in our herd's fertility since then and I'm

convinced that Actisaf is making a difference," explained Trevor.

In 2015, Trevor's herd achieved the best calving interval in the local Breffnie Oriel Holstein Friesian Club, with an interval of 366 days. He attributed his successes then to Actisaf and he has been able to maintain that level of performance to date.

"On paper, our current calving interval is 374 days, but that includes cows earmarked for culling," Trevor said.

"Once we take that into account, and remove those cows, our calving interval has improved since 2015. I truly believe that using Actisaf has improved the rumen function of our cows and led to this improvement in overall performance and fertility, and my cows won't go without it anytime soon. It has more than paid for itself on this farm!"

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