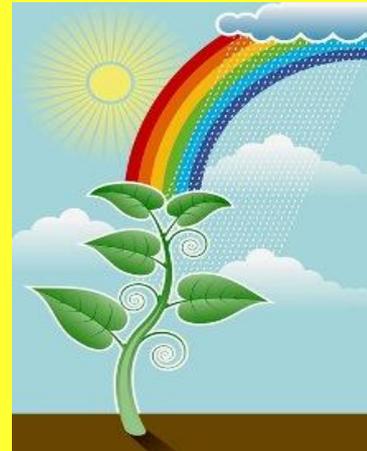


FARMING DIARY FOR JULY

When is it going to stop? I don't think we really need to say what we are referring to, but yes, it's the rain!! Farmers are known for never being happy with the weather, but I think this summer farmers speak for everyone (including the cows!).



We are in a more fortunate position than some of our farming friends and neighbours who have had to bring all their cattle back in. Luckily our ground is normally fairly dry so can take all this rain better than some. However the fields down by the river are still water logged from recent flooding and the rest of the farm is soft underfoot.

Due to the high water content in the grass at the moment, the cows are unable to eat as much as they really need, resulting in a significant drop in milk yields of about 20%. We have started feeding the cows with some big bale silage leftover from last winter to increase the dry matter in their diet, to hopefully prevent the milk production from falling any further. With the ground water logged and cold, the grass growth has slowed down and we are becoming short of grazing. Also, clover does not grow very well in these conditions, and as an organic farm, we rely on the nitrogen produced by the clover.



As well as affecting milk yields the wet weather is also leading to a higher number of cases of lameness than usual. This is due to the cows' feet being softened by the wet ground, allowing small stones to puncture their soles. To correct this, we glue a wooden block to the good claw of the injured foot to take the pressure off so that the wound can heal. Lameness also contributes to reduced milk yields.

As we said in our last update, we would like to make our 2nd cut silage in July, and although the grass was ready to cut 10 days ago, the ground is far too wet to allow the contractors onto the fields as the weight of the big machines will compact the soil structure and cause long term damage. The grass is starting to go to seed so we will lose some of the nutritional value, meaning the silage that we eventually make won't provide as much energy and protein as we would hope.

This is very worrying coupled with predictions for an uncertain cereal harvest in this country, inevitably leading to high concentrate prices this winter. The world wide harvest is also looking poor, as in America they have the opposite problem, and are suffering with a drought! Demand will be higher with farmers needing to supplement their own forage crops, and cows that have already been housed needing to be fed a winter diet now. We try to forward buy our concentrate feed, but this is a gamble with the market rising at present.



Not only is the weather holding up our silage making, it's also preventing us from getting slurry out onto the fields, and putting our plans to have a digger in to extend cow tracks on hold too.

No doubt you have read in the press and seen on the news, milk prices have dropped to an unsustainable level, and we hope you will all show your support for the British Dairy Farmer.

The Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers



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