MANAGING DAIRY GRAZING BY MONITORING WEEKLY PASTURE GROWTH AND UTILIZATION

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The use of weekly pasture cover measurements have been shown useful in New Zealand and Ireland to estimate daily growth rates, feed inventories and for feed budgeting. The objectives of this project were to document weekly pasture growth, forage quality and utilization and to understand how to use this information to make management decisions on US dairies. One dairy was studied for a two-year period. Pastures were measured and mapped and total standing dry matter was estimated weekly in all 22 pastures using a calibrated rising plate meter. Measurements started with the grazing season in the spring in March and continued until the end of November. Weekly grazing wedges were developed, printed and were used to make grazing decisions that week. Paddocks grazed and residual pasture covers were recorded daily and forage cover measurements were measured weekly and entered into management software. Paddock grazing and residual heights were also included in the electronic recordkeeping. Dry matter yields for each paddock ranged from 11,312 to 20,257 lbs. per acre. Daily pasture DM growth averaged 47 and 49 a day for 2012 and 2013. In 2012, during the 9 month grazing season the dairy averaged 1089 lbs. of milk solids per acre and 739 lbs. per cow and in the second year the dairy averaged 793 lbs. of milk solids and 640 lbs. of milk solids per cow. In 2012 the dairy produced 85% of the total DM consumed as pasture and 72% for the 2013 season.

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