



With many cows already being offered what amounts to a winter ration and true winter on the horizon Chris Savery, MGA ruminant consultant, takes a timely look at the protein supplementation options available.

This summer hot and dry weather has, in many cases, limited grazing and has led to a diminished protein supply from grass. This has often required the feeding of additional purchased protein as well as an energy source to balance the conserved forage.

Old favourites

Soyabean and rapeseed meal remain the proteins of choice for most farmers, be they as straights or combined in blends, concentrates or compounds. A key reason being that for the last 2 – 3 months the prices of soya and rape has been generally very favourable, even though increased transport costs have had an impact. While prices have been favourable during this summer, the protein % and quality of the Soya/Rape combination mean they are good value even at last winter's inflated costs.

The global status of Soya as a protein source means that weather, fund trading and the exchange rate can have a dramatic and very sudden impact on prices. That said, soya prices, currently in the mid £140's, are predicted to move ahead only gradually. Rape costs have been rising due to shortages, but forward prices should remain reasonably favourable in the mid £80's.

Soya/Rape proportions??

Although soya as a protein source on its own is acceptable, benefits / savings are possible by combining it with rapeseed. I have suggested in the past that when the price difference between rape and Brazilian soya is greater than £45, the inclusion of rapeseed can positively reduce the cost of the dietary protein. This benchmark takes into account

the lower energy content (12.0 MJ/kg DM for Rape compared to 13.8 MJ/kg DM for Brazilian soya) as well as the difference in protein % and quality. It is also worth remembering that the benchmark will vary depending on the type of protein fed. Argentinean Soya has the lowest protein at 42%; Brazilian at 44/45% is second highest with Hipro at 49% offering the most concentrated protein option. Remember that while similar in name and a very good feed in its own right, Soya hulls are not a protein source, containing only 10% protein!

Other protein options

Many other feeds are important protein sources, even though they may have been primarily purchased for their energy content. Two currently popular feeds that fall into this category are US Maize Distillers and Maize Gluten. Supply problems exist for both this winter due to the fact that certain GM maize varieties have not been cleared for use in the EU. As a consequence, shippers are only quoting for early winter supply. Lack of supply is an issue for farmers and compounders and is likely to show itself in higher prices. Old stock will be available at increased prices and it is worth remembering that the US is not the only source of such products.

As alternatives, wheat and barley distillers grains should be available from UK and European sources. Protein content will vary ranging from around 26% for barley-based products to high protein wheat distillers at 36% protein. On farm prices will vary between £110 – 140 / tonne.

Pulses

Peas, beans and especially lupins could provide a valuable protein contribution to many diets. Unfortunately, few lupins are available, but the supply of peas and beans should be good. Processing of beans can be more difficult than peas and with both pulses being high in starch there may be a need to reduce the cereal content of some diets. Lower still in protein, but still a potential component of a blend, is palm kernel (15% protein). Palm Kernel should make up no more than 15 – 20 % of the daily concentrate allocation.

Liquid protein suppliants

Liquid feeds will continue to have a place in diets for all classes of livestock. However, the increasing price of molasses, their base ingredient, may bring value for money into question. The addition of liquid feeds to this years dry forages, to increase intake and reduce selection, may prove worthwhile however, bearing in mind the value for money question, it may be worth checking that you are in fact gaining the intake/selection benefits. Protein supply in the liquid can be as urea nitrogen or 'natural' protein with protein levels ranging from 9% - 45% (dry matter basis).

Urea

The addition of urea prills to diets must be well managed and will suit some members. That said, the addition of urea rarely provides cheaper supplementation than more conventional options and the forecasts suggest Urea prices are on the rise.

Moist Feeds

Moist feeds can provide useful additional protein, but again their comparably high prices may mean that the 'cost per % protein' is higher than that for soya and rape. The dry summer has reduced availability markedly and it is likely to be some time until any new products arise from ethanol production. The price paid for moist feeds must take account of utilization/storage issues on farm.

The return of fishmeal!

There has been some mention of fishmeal possibly becoming available as a ruminant feed. I think this is unlikely and suspect that prices will dictate that, even if it became available, it would prove to be uneconomic. Other specialized high protein feeds such as prairie meal and protected soya may have a place, but as with any high cost ingredient, the price premium must be fully justified.

Buying advice

Decisions as to when to buy will remain difficult, however, I would suggest it is desirable to lock into a reasonable price rather than try to hit the bottom. Protein prices, in particular soya, can rise very quickly with little warning. Finally, I would add that whether you seek a soya, rape, distiller's product or a maize fraction, be certain you are clear what you are expecting to receive and that it fits in well with the other feeds available.

If you require any more information, please give the office a ring for Chris's contact details.