



Achieving Milk From Forage Part 1 - An Introduction

Amid general high costs of production, purchased feed costs represented about 26% of total costs and averaged 12.7ppl for the year ending September 2023 - it is therefore essential to think of ways to boost profitability.

Efficient use of forage and fodder, and replacing purchased feeds with quality forages therefore remains a sensible approach for most dairy farmers.

In addition, concern for climate change is not going away, indeed, many milk processors now have initiatives to encourage their suppliers to commit to sustainability and reduce carbon footprints on their farms.

Milk from home grown forage will certainly have a role for a sustainable future, both economically and financially.

This Dairy Insight is the first in a series of publications exploring milk from forage and together will provide a comprehensive, yet practical guide to realising your forage potential.



In a recent survey, **27% of the UK population** puts **climate change** at the **top** of their list of main worries.

Key Points

Efficient use of all feeds and replacing purchased feeds with quality forages remains a sensible approach for most dairy farmers.

It doesn't matter whether you are a small family producer or large scale business - boosting milk produced from forage will benefit your bottom line.

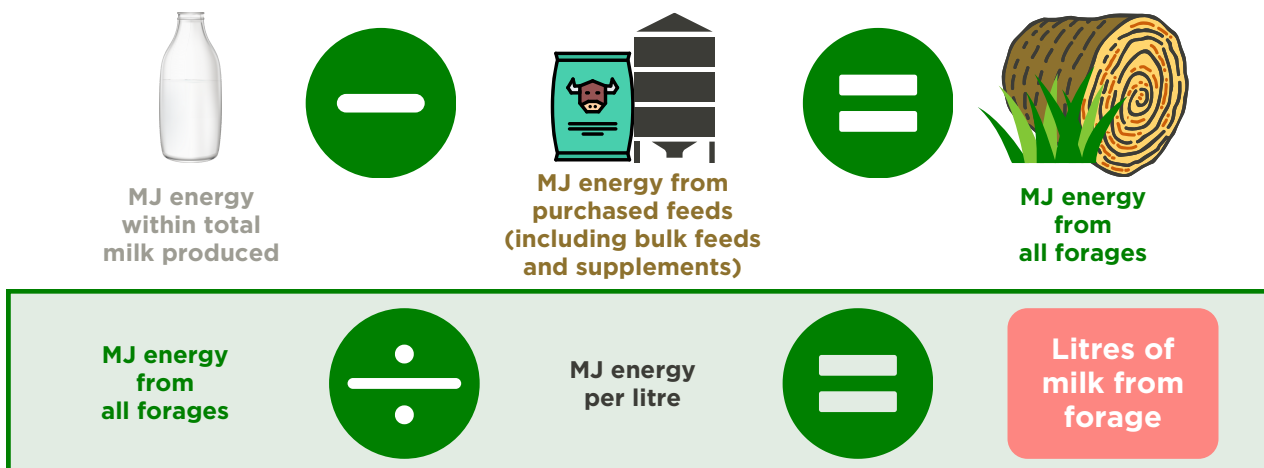
Successful farming businesses strive for outstanding performance. Setting your own KPIs involves two vital steps: assessing your current position and setting SMART goals. Ultimately, aiming to consistently rank among the top 10% is a strategic long-term approach that ensures sustained growth and excellence.

This publication along with forthcoming publications in this series will equip you with actionable insights to enhance milk production from forage on your farm. These resources will provide practical information to tailor to your needs, guiding you towards effective solutions and maximising your farm's potential for improved milk production from forage.

Milk From Forage Calculation

Milk from forage is the energy to produce the milk litres (adjusted for butterfat & protein) minus the energy supplied from purchased feeds, including any bulk or moist feeds. The remaining energy is assumed to be produced from forage (both conserved & grazed), and divided by the energy per litre to give the litres of milk from forage.

Calculation:

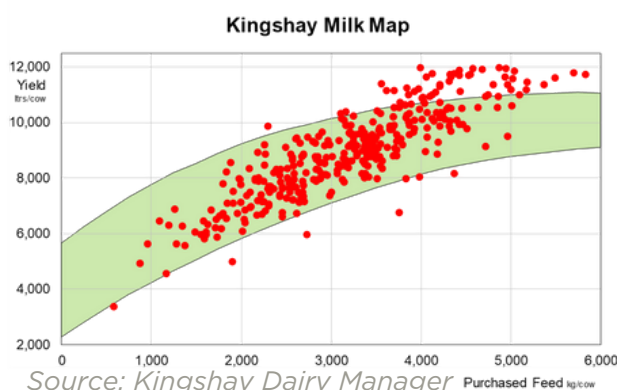


For this calculation to be accurate, check the energy values of any compounds or blends used.

The Value of Milk From Forage

Making better use of quality conserved forages and more effective use of grazing in rations will help control feed costs. It will also reduce the reliance on purchased in feed to help maintain milk yields.

Kingshay's Milk Map (which plots yield against purchased feed use) is a useful tool to establish how feed efficient you are.



Realising Milk From Forage

Taking account of the full growing costs, including land and rent, **grass is the cheapest form of feed, typically costing 3.3p/litre when grazed and 7.5p/litre for good quality first cut silage. That compares extremely favourably to a quality parlour concentrates at 14.8p/litre.**

Unlocking the potential of milk production from forage isn't limited to traditional, low-yielding operations. Even high-yielding systems stand to gain immense benefits. By harnessing innovative techniques and strategic management practices, dairy farmers across all scales can elevate their forage utilisation to unprecedented levels of productivity.

It's time to dispel the myth that maximising milk from forage is exclusive to certain types of herds. Whether extensive, high-yielding or anything in between, every operation has the opportunity to thrive through optimised forage utilisation.



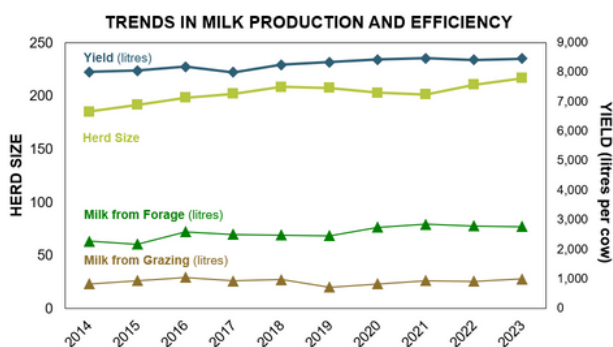
It doesn't matter whether you are a small family producer or large intensive business - boosting milk produced from forage will benefit your bottom line.



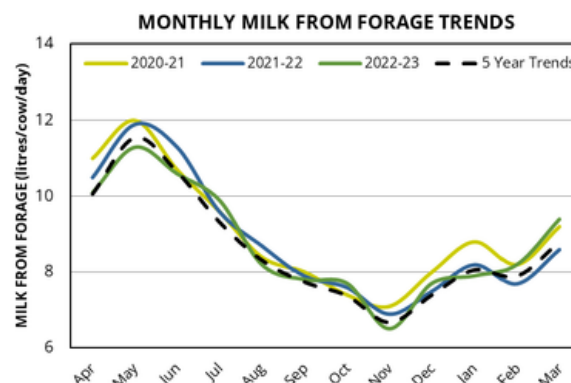


Milk From Forage Trends

Milk from forage and from grazing have also remained relatively static since 2020 (see first graph below), with slight variations due to weather conditions (see second graph below, for seasonal variations). However, looking back further, over 10 years they have grown by 31% and 9%, respectively.



Source: Kingshay Dairy Costings Focus Report 2023



What Is Your Potential? - Milk From Forage Targets

It's often assumed that milk from forage will be consistently higher in lower yielding herds and lower by necessity in higher yielding herds. Analysis of Dairy Manager results shows that is not the case. The range of milk from forage within yield bands are achieved with minimal differences in yield between the groups compared.

Range of Milk From Forage Within Yield Bands

Milk Yield Bands (litres per cow)	Milk from Forage (litres per cow)			
	Top 10%	Top 25%	Average	Bottom 25%
Less than 6,000 litres	3,711	3,367	2,441	1,370
5,000 to 6,000 litres	4,074	3,767	2,750	1,476
6,000 to 7,000 litres	4,205	3,899	2,871	1,733
7,000 to 8,000 litres	4,321	3,950	2,771	1,519
8,000 to 9,000 litres	4,571	4,093	2,808	1,438
Over 10,000 litres	4,385	3,973	2,532	1,011

Source: Kingshay Dairy Manager, Sept 2023 year end

Looking at potential milk from forage targets, for all herds (apart from the highest yielding herds - yielding over 10,000 litres per cow) an average target milk from forage of 3,000 litres per cow is a good guide. This will depend on stocking rates though; herds with a higher stocking rate would need to lower their expectation of milk from forage per cow, and/or use milk from forage per hectare as their KPI.

The top 25% of herds would be achieving nearly 4,000 litres per cow with the top 10% reaching nearly 4,500 litres per cow (see table above).

Successful farming businesses strive for outstanding performance.

Setting your own KPIs involves two vital steps: assessing your current position and setting SMART goals. Ultimately, aiming to consistently rank among the top 10% is a strategic long-term approach that ensures sustained growth and excellence. (See [Planning Your Business Strategy Workbook](#) for more information on setting goals.)

Set realistic KPI goals in easy to manage stepping stones...

STEP BY STEP

- If you are currently around average, aim for the top 25%
- If you are currently in the top 25%, aim for the top 10%
- If you are currently in the top 10%, aim to stay there!

Improved Margins

Improved milk from forage directly impacts margins by reducing the dependency on purchased feed. When cows are efficiently converting forage into higher-quality milk, it decreases the need for costly supplementary feed. This, in turn, lowers feed expenses and increases profit margins.



Focussing on the figures really is worthwhile. If you benchmark you know where you are and can plan to move forward; it's all about realising the true value of forage.

Given that producing milk from forage is seen as a key indicator of financial efficiency, why is it so difficult to improve? - The answer, of course, is because it is not that straight forward and multifactorial and will vary herd to herd.



What Are The Barriers?

The main obstacles to getting more from forage are:

- insufficient farm infrastructure, both at grazing and during the housing period.
- improved understanding of the crop during the grazing season as well as maximising the conserved crop.
- understanding the impact of the cow both at grazing and housed.

However, there are often plenty of ways around these barriers, sometimes with very little expenditure.

Other factors, such as the greater weather extremes, provide additional challenges and require more resilience (flexibility and agility) in your system i.e. a buffer of forage stocks. **#ControlTheControllable!**

The forthcoming publications in this series will delve into these specific areas, equipping you with actionable insights to enhance milk production from forage on your farm. These resources will provide practical information to tailor to your needs, guiding you towards effective solutions and maximising your farm's potential for improved milk production from forage.



What's essential is having unwavering **belief and confidence in your system**. The cornerstone lies in **meticulous attention to detail** and embracing a **flexible mindset**.

Whether you and your business are looking for traditional ongoing consultancy or one-off solutions, we can provide a fresh set of eyes, to provide clarity for your farming business.



01458 851 555
consultancy@kingshay.co.uk
www.kingshay.com

kingshay | consultancy

