

***Wet winters: Forage Quality and Buffer Use***

With the unusually wet winter in many parts of the country, it appears that forage quality will be poorer than normal. Hay crops that usually are put up as dry hay, will be made into silage and increasing use of high moisture corn is expected. Dairy rations that rely on these feeds, will be the most affected. In general, it will increase the need for concentrate feeding and decrease the forage to insure nutritional support of milk production. While achieving adequate fiber should not be a problem, additional grain may need to provide enough soluble carbohydrates for optimal production. The increased use of silages will also result in higher levels of acidity in the diet. These changes in ration formulation will increase the potential for both clinical and subclinical acidosis. With increased use of ensilaged feeds and high moisture grain, the level of buffer recommended for high producing cows is 1.0% of the ration dry matter. This is higher than the usual inclusion rate of 0.75% of the ration. This higher inclusion rate can help in minimizing the risks of acidosis and maintaining consistent dry matter intake. The use of a high quality buffer, such as FMC's S-Carb® or sodium bicarbonate, and carefully monitoring the ration balance can be an important part of balancing dairy rations in the upcoming year.