

Quality is king when you're bottling milk on the farm

When you're supplying liquid milk to the general public, you have a good feel for the market. This not only keeps you in touch with what the market demands but it also brings into sharp focus exactly what should be avoided.

This has been the experience of Fiona Best (*pictured*), who runs the herd at Dales Dairies – a family-run operation at Town Head Farm in Grassington, which supplies milk throughout the Yorkshire Dales and far beyond, including to large centres of population such as Bradford and Leeds.

The 150-head herd, owned - along with the dairy - by the Oversby family, is one of around 20 herds whose milk is retailed by the company, where animal health, welfare and the hygienic standards of milk are all high priorities.

So, when a problem developed in the silage pits on the home farm, which started to impact on animal health and performance, the team was keen to stamp on it fast.

"We'd been looking forward to opening the silage as we'd had it analysed as a matter of routine, and found the nutritional quality to be good," says Fiona. "But as soon as we opened the clamp, it started heating, moulding and even weeping at the face.

"The deterioration was rapid and you could see the moulds and yeasts and feel the heat within hours of the clamp being opened," she says. "The bacterial silage inoculant which had preserved the forage well, just didn't seem to help once the pit was open."

Keen not to offer contaminated feed to the livestock, the team forked off the mould before the feed went in the wagon, yet still it heated up in the troughs and large amounts were rejected.



As palatability declined, so intakes went down and milk yields were hit hard, diminishing by around four litres/head/day, which in turn had a knock-on effect on fertility.

"So much stems from the forage, and the quality was hitting performance all the way through," says Fiona, remarking that the problems continued over two years.

Working with their nutritionist, William Marsland from Phoenix Feeds, exhaustive testing of the silage yielded no conclusive results, and William finally suggested they considered switching from a bacterial inoculant to a silage preservative instead.

Putting the team in touch with Michael Carpenter from forage preservation specialists, Kelvin Cave Ltd, he immediately recommended the preservative Safesil, which he said would wipe out moulds from the outset.

Also practising good clamp management all the way through, including sealing with the double layered sheeting, O₂ Barrier 2in1, Fiona says the improvement has been stark.

"Basically, we have not looked back," she says. "We've had very little wastage, if any, ever since we started, and we will definitely be sticking with the new system."

Yields in the Holstein Friesian herd are said to be right back on track at 32 litres per day and reproductive performance has significantly improved.

"Yes, the silage preservative may be a little more expensive," she says. "But when you look at the improvement in yields and fertility, it has paid for itself several times over."

Furthermore, she adds: "The dairy has standards that all of our suppliers have to adhere to so it's particularly important that we're doing our part of the job correctly - which I'm glad to say we are!"

