

You are what you eat

You are what you eat – even if you are a dairy cow - and Staffordshire farmer Nigel Roobottom is serving up the very best for his milking herd. In fact, his gourmet maize silage is so good he has just won the Staffordshire & Birmingham Agricultural Society's award for best 2011 forage maize.

Nigel, who trades as N & F Roobottom, keeps 220 Holstein Friesian cows plus 100 followers at Highlands Park Farm, Burton on Trent, Staffordshire, and aims to produce as much milk from homegrown feed as possible. The cows graze from mid-March to the end of October, rotating between paddocks to maximise grass growth and utilisation. However, he also buffer feeds them with a total mixed ration throughout the year to supplement the grass and avoid dramatic changes in diet.

The farm is sown with 45 acres of Konsort maize, 45 acres of cereals for wholecrop and crimped wheat, and 10 acres of Lucerne, plus 260 acres of grass. "I harvest the maize in early November – that's later than most other farms, as I like to wait until the grain is fully formed and ready. I also don't chop it too short, maintaining a good texture throughout. I believe this achieves a much better, more open ration for the cows."

This year Nigel preserved his whole crop and maize silage with Safesil, a new food-grade silage preservative which eradicates undesirable bacteria, yeasts and moulds. Applied at 1.5 litres per tonne of silage, it facilitates more rapid and hygienic fermentation, preventing dry matter and energy losses, says Ian Hall, Sales Director at supplier Kelvin Cave Ltd. "Without those unwanted organisms, the silage remains cooler and will stay fresh for significantly longer, reducing wastage at the clamp face and during feed out."

Although Nigel uses a contractor to harvest all his forage, he prefers to roll the silage himself to ensure the clamp shoulders are tight, as he takes great pride in having minimal silage waste. Kelvin Cave's Crimpstore preservative has been used on the farm's homegrown wheat for six years, but this is the first year Safesil has been applied to Nigel's forage crops. With the cows being fed maize during the summer, keeping it in perfect condition no matter how hot the weather, is essential.

And it's good stuff. This year his maize silage tested at 41.7% dry matter, 8% protein, 11.5 MJ/Kg of metabolisable energy and 36.5% starch. Nigel formulates his feed rations according to the cows' yields, with the year-round calving herd split into high yielding, mid and low



yielding groups. Alongside the homegrown forage, he also buys in a protein blend and soya hulls or sugar beet pulp, depending on price.

"We milk twice a day and work hard to maximise our cows' health. If we can get that right, everything else drops into place." And it's clearly working. Over the last few years yields have improved by 700 litres and are now averaging 8,500 litres, with top-notch forage playing an important role. "I am delighted at winning this award. I've also applied Safesil to my wholecrop and second cut grass silage, which is still waiting to be unwrapped for the cows – hopefully that will be of prize winning quality as well."

