

A 'glass and a half' from quality forage

Next time you enjoy a bar of Cadbury Dairy Milk, remember the famous claim that it contained 'a glass and a half in every bar'; there's a good chance that the milk may have come from J T Jackson & Sons' dairy herd.

As part of their contract with Cadbury, the Jacksons are required to maintain an average butterfat level of 4.15% throughout the year, making breeding and forage quality priorities in order to maintain this.

BOOSTING BUTTERFAT

While Friesians account for the majority of the 140-cow milking herd on the 120ha they farm near Trowbridge in Wiltshire, it also contains some British Shorthorns, Jerseys and Swedish Reds in order to boost butterfat. Fed a mainly grass silage based diet plus 8kg of fodder beet, current yields average 7,500 litres, of which 2,800 is from forage, with the all-important butterfat currently at 4.3%.

To retain control over their silage making, John Jackson and his sons Dan and Ben run their own foraging machinery. Since 2007 they have run a CLAAS QUANTUM 3500P forage wagon to achieve a long 40mm chop length. Making up the foraging team are a set of DISCO 3200 CONTOUR front and rear mower conditioners bought last year and a LINER 2700 rake.

CONTROL OF HARVEST

"Running our own foraging machinery gives us control over the harvesting operation and allows us to be flexible as to when we harvest, and to work with the season," states Dan. "We don't push for output. We aim to take three cuts, but do bring in a contractor with a wagon to help for first cut, but after that having three of us it suits our system well."

Bought through CLAAS Western at nearby Frome, the new set of DISCO mowers replaced a smaller DISCO 3050C, which was bought second hand a number of years ago, but had served them well.

"We did price up another make that was cheaper, but being fairly new to the market they are unproven, while the DISCO has been around for years. WESTERN are also three miles down the road and the service we receive accounts for a lot. They are great to deal

with and we know that if we have a problem they will be there to support us whatever day of the week.

"Not having used or set-up front and rear mowers before, Darren (Halliwell – Field Sales Manager) was more than happy to even come out on a Saturday to show us what to do, and having driven a COUGAR for a local contractor he has mown and knows more about mowing than we ever will!"

DOUBLE THE OUTPUT

Investing in the DISCO CONTOUR front and rear combination gives the Jacksons double the output, and makes far better use of their 140-hp tractor, at no extra running cost. It's also a lot easier for them to get plenty of grass down when they have the contractor coming in. The land is also quite spread out, so later in the year it also gives the potential to just use the front mower and zero-graze off-lying ground to bring fresh grass to the cows, which they couldn't before.

Ben is mainly in charge of mowing and quickly adapted to having both a front and rear mower to look after. "Once I had been shown by Darren, they are very easy to set-up and operate. Turning or changing the blades couldn't be simpler and its very easy to adjust the conditioner, as I do like to alter the aggression depending on grass type and conditions.

"I aim to leave a 3-inch stubble and the two mowers leave an even and clean stubble. Timeliness has definitely improved and we are achieving far more consistency. Generally we aim to leave the grass to wilt for 24 hours before raking up as close as possible in front of the wagon, which works well," concludes Ben.





As part of their contract with Cadbury, John Jackson and his sons Ben (below left) and Dan (right) are required to maintain an average butterfat level of 4.15% throughout the year, making breeding and forage quality priorities in order to maintain this.

