

## Stockfeed Vegetables for Spring Calving Suckler Cows

Following the wet summer forage stocks are very low in many areas and many are looking for alternatives to replace silage or straw in cow diets. Depending on your location your merchant might point you towards swedes, beet pulp, carrots etc.

Spring calving suckler cows whose calves have been weaned before housing or wintering have relatively low energy and protein requirements. Silage is an excellent winter feed for dry suckler cows since a typical baled silage of 10 ME (energy) and 11% CP (crude protein) provides sufficient energy and protein for her to maintain condition through the winter, and can be fed almost to appetite so keeps her full and content. However if you start to replace this with feed which is much higher or lower in energy or protein then you can run into problems.

Harvested vegetables like swedes, potatoes or carrots etc are generally much higher in energy than baled silage, but low in protein (unlike brassicas grazed *in situ* where the protein rich leaves are also eaten).

Feed	ME (MJ)	CP% (Crude Protein)
<b>Baled silage (typical – ‘average’ quality)</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>11%</b>
Barley straw	8.6	3.5%
Swedes	14.0	9%
Potatoes	13.3	9%
Carrots	12.8	10%
Sugar Beet Pulp Pellets	12.5	10%

Using vegetables to replace silage can result in a diet that is higher in energy than required. Adding straw to the diet (if even available) will help to reduce the overall energy levels since straw is lower in energy than silage – but because the straw is also very low in protein, this further reduces the protein levels in the diet below acceptable levels. Therefore a silage/straw/vegetable diet will probably also need a protein source such as rapeseed meal, soya, wheat distillers dark grains etc.

If you are going to have to feed some vegetables then it is essential that you consider the following:

- Get an analysis of your silage. It is impossible to predict energy or protein levels by looking at silage, often very nice smelling well-made bales can be very low in both, or conversely some fairly unpleasant wetter baled silages can analyse surprisingly well.
- If you do need to feed vegetables then consider other ways in which you can reduce the cow's energy requirements – e.g. leaving spring-born calves suckling until up to 6 weeks pre-calving, or wintering cows outside (which will also save bedding).
- Whole potatoes are a choke hazard and should be chopped.
- Remember to include a proprietary suckler cow mineral supplement at the manufacturers recommended rate.
- Contact your local consultant (or the FAS helpline 0300 323 0161) for advice on how to balance a ration, or to arrange a silage analysis.

**Chloe McCulloch**

Senior Agricultural Consultant, FRBS Dumfries & Ayr