

Good forward planning key to winter feeding

By Gemma Mackenzie

Livestock producers up and down the country need to carefully plan their feed rations for the winter, following the variable weather conditions this year.

According to feed companies at this year's Dairy Event and Livestock Show, the outlook is variable, with many facing severe feed shortages, while others face the challenge of correctly managing bumper silage yields.

KW Alternative Feeds nutritionist Dave Collett said the key to success for the coming season was forward planning.

"It's important for farmers to assess the forage they have got and how many kg/DM they can afford to feed the cows for 365 days. Cows hate change, so farmers should be

aiming to keep as consistent a diet in front of the cows as possible, not just for the winter but for 365 days of the year," he added.

BOCM PAULS director of feeds marketing Frank Thomson said a good starting point for all producers was to evaluate their forage position and assess what extra feedstuffs they need early.

"The key is looking at the balance of the ration, because there's no point putting in something to replace the forage if it won't perform with the cows."

Mike Phillips from NWF Agriculture said an easy way to assess feed requirements was to look at what the animal requires based on animal type, housing and production, and then what was available via feed availability and analysis.

"Those facing a shortage need to review what they have got available



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and get their silage analysed as well as looking at how much is in the clamp. I think maize stock is variable and we have to be careful of anything that's cheap as well."

And for those in the opposite position, facing full clamps of good

quality first and second cut silage, Keenan nutritionist Mark Voss said careful planning was needed to ensure the feed was efficiently used by the cows.

He said: "Those with bumper amounts of feed need to be careful about how much they are feeding and look at the fibre profile of the diet to be sure it's going to be in the cows' rumen for long enough."