

Feeding swedes to dairy cows

Advice to farmers

1. Feeding swedes in spring 2017

Farmers should be very cautious when feeding swedes, in this year. Special care is needed with HT-swedes and other leafy varieties (e.g. Aparimu Gold, and Triumph), if/when warm air temperatures from northerly weather conditions, cause swedes to regrow and change quickly.

HT-swedes have higher concentrations of GSLs in “reproductive” plant parts, increasing the risk of ill-health for cows grazing swedes with elongated stems and the appearance of flowers. DairyNZ recommends extreme caution when grazing any swedes that have bolted.

DairyNZ recommends that farmers do not feed HT-swedes on the milking platform in late August/early September (late pregnancy, early lactation) when all the factors that lead to ill-health and potential cow deaths (warmer temperatures, new leaf growth, bolting) can rapidly combine.

This recommendation is based on the following factors:

- As soon as the weather begins to warm the swedes will begin to enter the reproductive phase. HT-swedes have a higher concentration of total GSLs in the plant parts where re-growth occurs. Beware of other leafy swede varieties as well.
- Heavily pregnant, springing and milking cows grazing swedes during winter and early spring, may be under pressure from toxins generated through consuming GSLs through that period.
- The cows are metabolically challenged due to late pregnancy and early lactation physiological changes and less able to cope with toxins arising from high concentrations of total GSLs in their diet.

Extreme caution is advised when swedes begin to regrow, especially HT-swedes and other leafy varieties.

It is essential that farmers observe the physical characteristics of the crop being fed, monitor the health of their cows and adjust their feed management if incidences of ill-health are observed.

For further information on the signs to look for and the actions to take see Swede Advisory #10 (www.dairynz.co.nz/farm/adverse-events/southland-swedes/).

2. Using HT-Swedes in your winter feeding programme

Should farmers choose to include HT-swedes in their winter feeding programme for 2017, or in future years, DairyNZ recommends that farmers use HT-swedes strategically.

We advise caution when starting to feed swedes in autumn as swedes that have not been frosted are likely to have lush, strong leaf growth. Should weather conditions change during winter where leaf growth and reproductive status are accelerated farmers should exercise caution and remain vigilant.

New leaf growth in autumn swedes may also have higher total GSLs. Also as the bulbs are still hard and difficult for cows to eat they may prefer grazing leaves. After two or three frosts the swede bulbs are softer and easier to consume and the leaves die back and start to drop off. The cows are then more likely to consume a better ratio of bulb to leaf.

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3. PGG Wrightson Seeds advice

Refer to PGG Wrightson Seeds endorsements and advice if you are considering HT-swedes as part of your wintering programme.

“PGG Wrightson Seeds recommends the prudent approach is that HT Swede (HT-S57) should not be grazed by pregnant or lactating dairy cows. This recommendation will be reviewed as more information becomes available from the scientific research being undertaken”.

