

The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Low Input All Grass Milking System

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<i>Farm Details</i>	Size 201 hectares Freehold. 91 hectares Leasehold
	Located close to Riverton and 30 kilometres west of Invercargill. Soils range from heavy clays with a mixture of peat and sand.
<i>Cow Numbers</i>	575 winter 550 peak milk
<i>Production</i>	410 to 439 kgms/cow 1310 to 1404 kgms/hectare
<i>Milking Platform</i>	(set each season) between 175 and 180 hectares.
<i>Stocking Rate</i>	3.0 to 3.2
<i>Breed</i>	predominantly kiwi cross
<i>Rainfall</i>	average annual 1150 millimetres
<i>Fertiliser</i>	soil test levels pH 5.8 - 6.0 P 20 – 30 K 3 – 7 S 10 – 12 Apply DAP or Pasturezeal in a split dressing.
<i>Nitrogen</i>	apply between 165 and 195 units per year.
<i>Supplements Fed</i>	280kgDM/cow silage (1/3 made on milking platform)
<i>Staff</i>	Three Permanent Six Part Time

Advantages of a Low Input All Grass Milking System

Low input cost

Simple system. Concentrate on feeding cows grass

Low capital cost

Low maintenance

Low labour input

Price of bought in silage is less volatile than grain, PKE or Molasses

No contracts to be bound to, and no storage to pay

Can trim costs easier in a low pay-out year (Use reserve silage)

Minimal need for feed transitioning

Easier to manage. **Focus** on grass growth and feed quality

Important to measure grass weekly and monitor and allocate accordingly

No risk of feeding high cost inputs while struggling to maintain feed quality

Specialist nutrition skills not required

Lower risk in terms of feed costs, management ability and production

Less birds and rodents around milking shed and storage facilities

Bought in feed increases stocking rate and nitrogen input, leaching and soil compaction

Suits our farm shape, balance of soils and management style

Disadvantages of a Low Input All Grass Milking System

Only have silage or baleage to make up feed deficit if it gets cold or dry

Quality of silage or baleage can be variable especially if bought in

Silage or baleage often has a lower ME compared to other supplements

Rely on fertiliser, nitrogen, Gibberallic Acid, and new grass cultivars to produce grass

In shed feeding using concentrates can improve cow flow

Additives such as magnesium, calcium and other minerals can be added to feed in an in-shed system.

Potential higher substitution with silage.

Sometimes can struggle to get required cow condition at critical times, however correct feed allocation and separate herds can help to overcome this. Important to have cows well fed in the winter with good condition at calving.

Need to be much more proactive in measuring grass.

Conclusion

We believe this system suits our farm and management style. Our rainfall and grass growth are relatively reliable. Our aim has always been to produce milk solids up to our cow's live weight each season, using an all grass based system, and producing as much profit as we can. We intend to continue this system as we believe we can improve it further, by improved genetics, pasture species and management.

