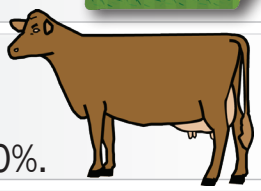
United States Department of Agriculture

10 reasons cows need forage

1 Provide protein: Legume forages can provide up to 75% of the protein needed by lactating dairy cows; corn silage can provide up to 25%.

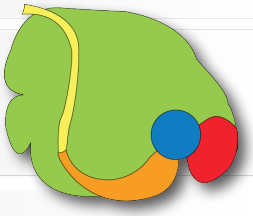
2 Provide fiber: Forages are often the only source of fiber in a cow's diet. Fiber is essential to slow the passage of feed, thereby increasing the amount of nutrients that the cow can absorb from the feed.

3 Maximize intake: Forages stimulate cud chewing and rumination, which improve the cow's appetite.



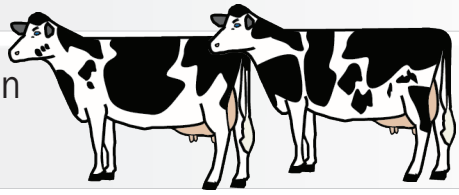
4 Provide energy: Forages are also an important source of energy -- especially corn silage which can provide up to 50% of energy needed in a cow's diet. Alfalfa silage can provide up to 40%.

5 Minimize acidosis: Acidosis occurs when excessive VFA production in the rumen causes cows to go off feed. Adequate forage and fiber greatly stimulate rumination (cud chewing) which buffers acids in the rumen.



6 Designed for rumen: Cows were designed to eat forages. With their rumens working as fermentation vats, cows turn plants and byproducts that we can't eat into foods we can.

7 Minimize laminitis: Many times when cows develop acidosis, they also develop laminitis. Adequate fiber in the diet greatly reduces both.



8 Reduce feed costs: Forages are an economical source of protein, energy and fiber compared to most concentrates.

9 Good for soil: With their deep roots and permanent ground cover, perennial forages help hold soil in place. They also increase the organic matter in soil, and legumes add nitrogen to the soil.

10 Sustainable: Perennial forages help protect the environment because they reduce surface water runoff and leaching of nutrients; they require less fertilizer; and they cover the soil year-round.

May copy for educational purposes.

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