

## **Profitability of Grass-Based Forages in SW New York Progress Report**

Sugar Maple Farms has historically struggled to grow a large percentage of corn and straight alfalfa on ground that is unsuitable for alfalfa production and many years of corn. Over the past couple of years the farm has started to make a transition to a larger percentage of perennial grasses on its heavier soils and has looked to manage these grass fields to obtain high yielding, high quality forage for dairy cows using Cornell University recommendations as guidelines.

This move has raised a number of questions for the owners and operators of the farm:

1. What is the cost per ton of growing grass and grass-legume mixtures as compared to the cost of growing corn on these particular soils?
2. Based on our production costs what does it cost to feed a ration composed of a high percentage of grass haylage compared to feeding a ration based on a higher percentage of corn silage?
3. With these costs of production for corn and haylage, what would be the optimum "ratio" of these feed stuffs on our farm?

When we undertook this project our goals were to answer these questions as a means of evaluating the economics of growing and feeding grass-based forages in the Southern Tier of Western New York.

### **Progress to Date**

The first step in carrying out this project involved calculating the cost of growing the different forage commodities on our farm: perennial grasses, grass/legume mixes, corn silage. This summer all of the data was recorded regarding yields, hours, fuel use, and direct input expenses by Jeffrey BonTempo of Sugar Maple Farms. This data has been input to a database that utilizes Reflex software by Dan Steward of the Western New York Crop Management Association.

Compilation and generation of costs for this data is being carried out primarily by Dan Steward and Andy Dufresne of Chautauqua County Cooperative Extension. Costs per ton of forage drymatter should be generated within the first few weeks of January. Analysis will also include examination of yields that were documented in 1993 and 1994.

We are currently looking for a nutritionist to devise a ration that will compare the cost of feeding these forages. Preferably we would like to use a ration balancer that utilizes the Cornell Net-Carbohydrate model. We will assume that through ration balancing we can make the equivalent amount of milk, regardless of the forage source.

### **Outreach**

A "twilight" meeting was held on July 13, 1995 on the Donald Steward Farm in Chautauqua County. The meeting was held in a field in which a number of different grass species and varieties had been established by Dale Dewing of Cornell Cooperative Extension and Dan Steward. Discussion focused on grass management issues such as fertilization and harvesting for quality, as well as an overview of this research project. Approximately 35 farmers attended the meeting.

Final results of this project will be summarized in a monthly newsletter sent out by the Western New York Crop Management Association to approximately 175 members. This summary will also be published in Extension in Action for Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties. Another "twi-light" meeting will most likely be held again in this coming July.