

FORUM ON THE USE OF GROUND STRAW IN CATTLE RATIONS

THREE questions were posed for discussion:

1. what is the biological basis for feeding ground straw to beef cattle?
2. what is the technical feasibility of producing rations containing ground straw?

and 3. can the use of such rations be profitable for the farmer?

Four contributors spoke briefly and their statements were followed by a general discussion.

Dr M. Kay (Rowett Research Institute) described 3 to 4 years' work with both young castrate male and female cattle. This showed that while the total dry matter consumed was increased the daily carcass weight gain was reduced when feeding diets containing ground straw.

Dr H. Swan (University of Nottingham) presented his own data which supported this. As the energy concentration of the diet is reduced (by increasing the proportion of ground straw), feed intake levels are increased in an attempt by the animal to maintain energy intake, but only to a certain level after which gut fill prevents any further increase.

Mr J. B. Kilkenny (Meat and Livestock Commission) gave an analysis of data from recorded commercial units using mobile milling and mixing services to produce rations containing ground straw. The cost per tonne of ration was reduced by increasing rates of straw inclusion. Nevertheless, while a 10% inclusion may reduce the cost per kg carcass gain, in the majority of situations feeding ground straw at this level showed little advantage over conventional feeding. These farms were fattening Friesian steers and other crossbred steers and heifers from 220 to 400 kg. Above a 10% inclusion of ground straw the costs of production per kg carcass weight increased.

Mr R. G. Henson (Stowe Park Feeds Ltd) also discussed the commercial use of ground straw and suggested that there were some savings to be made with younger cattle, between 4 and 6 months of age.

It may be concluded that little detailed information is yet available on the biological basis for feeding these rations; that the costs of milling are high and often prohibitive; but that the economic data from commercial units may show small advantages at inclusion levels up to 10%.