

Forage choice to reduce feed costs

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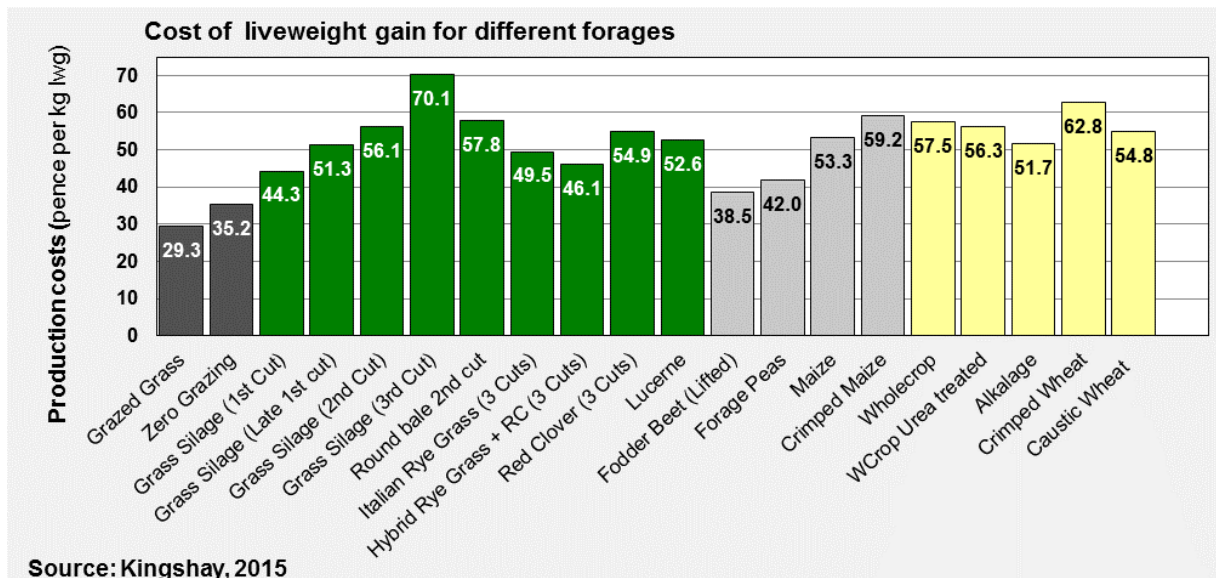
Forage is the basis for most ruminant diets and often the greater the percentage of forage in a ration, the lower the cost of production. Growing and managing forage well is one of the key drivers of livestock farming profitability. Poor quality forage, both grazed and conserved, or the wrong choice of forage, will increase the reliance on bought-in concentrates and lead to lower margins.



Understanding the cost of growing forage is a vital part of the planning process. Producers will need to decide on the most suitable crops for their farm's conditions and feed



requirements. While grazed forages are the cheapest, the quality and type of conserved forage will dictate livestock growth rates and/or the cost of production. The graph below shows a comparison of cost per kg of liveweight gain for different forages.



The timing of when grass silage is cut will affect the quality of it and therefore the cost of meat production. But there are other options to consider which may help to increase a producer's farm output while lowering costs. For instance, growing a three to five year red clover and hybrid ryegrass ley or a catch crop of forage peas could boost forage protein levels, build soil fertility, reduce feed costs and are a good alternative to grass silage.

Maize can be an expensive crop to grow, but provides a useful source of starch into growing and finishing diets. The figures in the graph are based on a yield of 17 tonnes freshweight per acre, so if potential yields are lower than this then maize could be an expensive way to feed stock.

Researching the cost and planning forage production, both grazed grass and conserved, will provide the information for producers to make the best decisions and ensure their herd is feed efficient.

[Use the EBLEX forage cost calculator to work out the cost of forage per hectare](#)