

Bright future in pipeline for messy molasses



By Mike Donovan

Molasses is one of those feeds which most farmers know about, but many ignore. The by-product appears in few adverts, and has always shunned the limelight. It's messy, and difficult to handle, a feeding idea that quickly goes on the back burner. Yet, molasses raises milk quality and production, improves cattle health and digestion of forage, it dilutes protein in the spring and it is affordable.

If the product was a nut or pellet, its popularity — and its price, no doubt — would be far greater. I see many progressive dairy and beef farms using it in their diets.

The messy liquid has its positive benefits. It mixes easily in any feed wagon, and if poured on top of silage and other feed, soon soaks through it. It flows faster in summer than winter, but doesn't freeze.

It doesn't corrode metal, so it can be stored in steel tanks, but its weight means that tanks need to be in good condition, and large tanks need a reinforcing frame of box section welded around them to stop the sides from bulging. Handling is the main drawback, and my pictures show a neat home-built trough which allows the farmer to add a measured amount of molasses to his diet feeder.



This molasses trough or tank is used for convenient handling of an under-appreciated feed ingredient.

The trough is made to fit inside the shear-grab, and it stands on feet which fit between the tines of the grab. With the cutter bar lowered, the trough is clamped in position, and it can then be lifted up and over the feeder, and the contents tipped in.

The front panel of the trough is slanted back, to allow all the contents to pour out. The trough is kept in the silage clamp, so any drips go on to silage, rather than to waste.

When the machine empties, the molasses runs down the inside of the cutter blade, and gets wiped off onto the next block of silage. The trough is filled with a pipe from the main molasses storage tank, and this provides an accurate measure of the volume being used.

Many farmers tow the diet feeder to the tank, and deliver for a measured period of time, but unless they regularly monitor the flow rate at different temperatures, the quantity

delivered per minute will vary enormously.

It's a pity molasses has such a low profile as a feed. A farmer with a rapid exit parlour and no feeders contacted me for ideas to fit a molasses feeder to each stall, so cows got a small shot of molasses — they'd come in quicker and save a lot of shooing. He's going to have to make something himself.



Another farmer uses ball feeders in his parlour, but would like a way of rationing the amount they eat. A third wants to get added magnesium into his milkers, and sees molasses as a useful way to make it palatable. There's a bright future for molasses in agriculture, but farmers can't expect to be sold it in quite the same way as some other feed additives that are specifically made and marketed for the industry. The result is that supply is often good, and the price per kg of energy is highly competitive with other feeds.



Mike Donovan produces the quartely Practical Farm ideas magazine (www.farmideas.co.uk) (This article appeared in Irish Examiner Farming Supplement on 10th May 2012)