Grazing practices, perception and expectations of Walloon dairy farmers.
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Introduction

The advantages of grazing are multiple:
• Environmental:
  Permanent grassland = carbon sink
  Preservation of landscape
• Economical:
  Grazing = decrease in feeding costs
  Positive effect on cows’ health
• Societal
  Good image for the consumer

However, grazing is decreasing and grassland areas are disappearing.

The aim of the survey:
To get an overview grazing practices and farmers’ expectations.
Thus to suggest ways of improving these practices and limiting grassland loss disappearance.

Material and Methods

A questionnaire of eighteen questions focused on:
• the description of the farm
• the grazing practices
• the perceptions and expectations

sent on 10/12/2015 to 3.152 Walloon dairy farmers with the help of the Comité du lait

Results

1004 answers - 32% answer rate
90.7% answers = conventional system
9.3% = organic farms
957 farms = grazing vs 35 farms = no grazing

Grazing of lactating cows: 96.5% farms
96% grazed more than 4 months
74% of farms grazed the lactating cows day and night
Supplement was given in 98% of farms during the grazing period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated grazed grass in cows’ diet (% TDMI)</th>
<th>&lt;25%</th>
<th>25-50%</th>
<th>50-75%</th>
<th>&gt;75%</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of total answers</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* TDMI: total dry matter intake

Comparison grazing – no grazing farms

Reasons for no grazing
• Environmental reasons: 9/35 farms
  bad weather
  poor soil conditions
  both
• Management difficulties: 27/35 farms
  difficulty to manage cows in pasture (18/35),
  the distance to pastures (12/35)
  limited grazeable areas (20/35).
• Economic reasons: 14/35 farms
  lower milk production at pasture
  other

Discussion - conclusion

• Grazing is still very common in Wallonia.
• The increased herd/farm size seems hinder grazing
• Management difficulties are the most common reason for no grazing
• In grazing farms, the proportion of grass in cows’ feed was moderate, even during the grazing period and a high level of supplementation was reported.

This may suggest low confidence in grass quality and quantity.

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