

Tip of the Month – May 2017

Robots and Grazing.

For a successfully grazing policy on farms with milking robots, you have to keep a few rules in mind:

- They start learning to graze when they are young!
- The keyword for grazing is “Early” : Early in year, early in the morning and early (young) learning is very important for succes
- Keep in mind what is achievable, a lot of grass in the cow and feeding little in the stall, or is grass just a dessert, a meadow as a runway, play meadow and then feed a lot in the stalls.

This really has to do with the amount of hectares grass and parcels round the farmhouse you have in relation to cows.

If you overestimate this relationship, the smallest change in weather or the length of season will mess with your plans.

- Cows constantly need to be triggered to move: if they are in the stalls, they should also want to go to the meadow and if they are in the meadow they should want to go the robot.

This can be achieved when you give the cows fresh grass every day and wait to add new feed in the stalls when they are outside.

- An ideal situation is one where they would go straight to the robots when they come in the stall and go to the troughs after they come out of the robot.
- A meadow selection port, Smartgate, could make it easier.
- The path to the pasture should be wide (2-way path) to accommodate easy transportation of cows. It should be at least so wide that the dominant cows don't have the chance to stop other cows from moving.

- Drinking water during warm weather is also crucial. It would be ideal to place the water alongside the path to the stall.

“Stichting Weidegang” (Foundation Grazing), from University Wageningen Holland, has elaborated on 5 possibilities, with the correct policy added to it.

It is assumed that the average cow eats about 15KG of dry feed per day.

Possibility 1 is the maximum grazing grass, which means 13 KG Dry Matter of grass and 2 kg of roughage in the stable.

Possibility 5 is the minimum grazing grass which means 2KG DM grass and 13KG roughage added in the stall.

The possibilities 2,3 and 4 includes policies gradually feeding less grass and adding more feed in the stall.

From nature behavior the cow prefers to eat most when she finds herself in the meadow in the morning and at dusk. And then, safely hidden, ruminating under a tree.

Finding ways to play with these times by giving more fresh grass or picking the cows up at certain times makes grazing more fun.

The tree has now been replaced by the roof of the barn.

If the weather is hot than you can use these times by having the cows graze in the mornings and evenings instead of during the day.