

Mixer choice influences fuel costs

HIGHER fuel costs have led to a greater awareness of fuel consumption among farmers in Ireland. One of the most important tasks for milk producers is the mixing and feeding of dairy rations because on many farms this takes place every day. This operation is demanding for the mixer wagon and also for the tractor that powers the mixing, haulage and feed out. The feeding operation can be one of the biggest consumers of diesel every year on most livestock farms.

The aim of all mixer wagons is to accurately mix the feed ingredients and, through the addition of silage, hay or straw to promote good digestion and ration utilisation. However, inevitably some mixer wagons will use more fuel than others depending on factors such as their gearing system and cubic capacity.

This was highlighted by a series of comparison tests held in Holland to establish the performance details of six makes of vertical auger mixers. In the power and fuel comparison tests the PTO power requirements for these machines, which included Kuhn, Storti and Strautmänn mixers, varied from 70 to 100hp. Used for only 15 minutes a day, this equates to an annual consumption of 1,700 litres and 2,500 litres of diesel for the 70hp and 100hp power requirements, respectively. The volume of fuel used would increase pro-rata when the feeders are used for longer daily periods with bigger herds.

A separate test by the National Agriculture Institute in Austria tested, among



Keenan claims their paddle feeders can be driven with less horsepower and at lower revolutions than competing mixer wagons, thereby achieving fuel savings.



The ration is based on grass and maize silage plus straw, hay, molasses, soya, home grown wheat and minerals.

cows and has a herd average of 10,700 litres. The cows are fed once a day on a TMR diet and are housed year round. According to Alex Robertson, manager at the Coopon Carse, changing from a twin vertical auger mixer wagon to a Keenan paddle machine has saved him £3,000 (£3,400) a year on fuel costs during feeding. Alex measured that the twin vertical auger mixer wagon was using 37 litres of diesel per day for feeding.

"It was while I was seeking a solution to our high fuel use that Keenan asked us to try their 28 cubic meter mixer wagon," he says. "The twin auger wagon needed to be driven at full PTO speed and soaked up the power. We make four loads a day - three for the cows and another for the dry cows. At 37 litres per day, we were spending over £6,000 (£6,800) on fuel each year just for ration mixing."

Keenan say their mixer, due to its gearing system, only requires the tractor to tick over for the angled horizontal paddles to gently lift and mix the ingredients. "At our last reckoning the tractor on the mixer was using 17 litres per day - a saving of 20 litres/day which is worth over £3,000 (£3,400)."

Coopon Carse farm is now also using Keenan's PACE system, which basically tells the operator which order to load the ingredients in, as well as how many revolutions of the mixer paddles are required to create the best mix. The TMR diet is based on grass and maize silage plus straw, hay, molasses, soya, home grown wheat and minerals.

FUEL SAVINGS

Coopon Carse farm in Newtown Stewart in southwest Scotland runs a herd of 500

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