

Wheat headlage and silage

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Any forage, let alone quality forage, is particularly hard to source under the current challenging conditions. Suring up bulk forage when the season improves will be the first priority. Once the pits are full again, shifting the focus to storing high quality feeds may be an option. Being very fortunate to receive some winter rain in the Mary Valley, some producers have trialed growing wheat as a winter cereal and forage option. Five varieties are being grown, including both forage and grain types. All being well, the crops will be taken for silage and headlage, with a full analysis, including economic, to be reported upon completion.

The wheat silage should be harvested in early September with yields looking like 9-10 tonnes dry matter (DM)/ha. Two varieties have been sown. Neither have lodged which has been a recurring problem with barley. The C4Milk team

at Gatton Research Dairy have grown forage wheat under dryland and irrigated conditions this year with the results to be published upon harvest. Early indications are that forage wheat has performed exceptionally well under dryland conditions.

On one farm in the Mary Valley, wheat headlage is being considered to supply the starch which is currently being filled with purchased grain. It is important to emphasise that on this farm, the silage pits still have ample feed available, with herd forage requirements being met. Work conducted by the C4Milk team at the Gatton Research Dairy resulted in wheat headlage yielding 5t DM/ha

(45% DM as harvested crop). The feed analysis are listed in Table 1, and it is hoped that these results will be improved even further in later harvests. Headlage is harvested approximately two weeks later than a silage crop using a honeybee front to take approximately half the crop, which is then processed through a chopper. Silage inoculant is applied at 1.5 times the rate of a standard silage with the material compacted extremely well and sealed. The headlage will be fed via the mixing wagon and combined with corn and sorghum silage. The wheat headlage is a high value crop of very high quality, with purchased pellets being fed at a significantly reduced rate when headlage is incorporated into

the diet. With the likely cost of wheat headlage being less than \$200/t DM fed to cows, the economics compared to purchased pellets at over \$550/t DM looks promising.

Grain prices are set to remain high for the foreseeable future. Having the option to ensile high starch forages may alleviate the rising cost of starch if the pits are full of forage. In a volatile commodity market, headlage and corn earlage are valuable commodities for dairy farmers and expand forage options if there is an opportunity to grow these alternative crops. ■■

	Commercial QLD Corn earlage	UQ wheat headlage	Commercial QLD wheat headlage	Commercial NSW triticale headlage
Starch (% DM)	49	32	25	40
Crude protein (CP) (% DM)	9	13	11	11
Metabolisable energy (ME) (MJ/kg DM)	13	11	10	12
Neutral detergent fibre (NDF) (% DM)	31	36	40	35

Table 1 Headlage and Earlage feed analysis

