The role of forage management in addressing challenges facing Australasian dairy farming

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Abstract

Forage management underpins the viability of pastoral dairy systems. This review investigates recent developments in forage research and their potential to enable pastoral dairy systems to meet the challenges that will be faced over the next 10 years. Grazing management, complementary forages, pasture diversity, fertiliser use, chemical restriction, irrigation management and pasture breeding are considered. None of these areas of research are looking to move farms along the production and input loss frontiers but rather they aim to lift the production frontier, defend against production decline or improve the efficiency of the resource. Technology approaches consistently focus on improving efficiency while genetic improvement or the use of complementary forages and species diversity aim to lift production. These approaches do not require additional labour to implement, but many will require an increase in skill level. Only a few areas will help address animal welfare (e.g. the use of selected complementary forages and novel endophytes) and only complementary forages will help address increased competition from non-dairy alternatives by positively influencing the properties of milk. Overall, the diversity of activity and potential impacts will provide managers of pastoral dairy systems with the knowledge and skills to meet the production and environmental challenges they face over the next 10 years.