

Dry cows lunch on TMR with switchgrass alternative

Last year, with straw in short supply and prices rising, Kees Van Esveld began looking for options

BY FRANCES ANDERSON

Ontario Farmer

Holmesville - Kesi Farms is among the top ten per cent of dairy farms in Ontario for herd management score, so it's fair to say that Kees and Yvonne Van Esveld are good managers.

One of the ways they've begun to manage their dry cows, over the past year, is to start feeding switchgrass.

The couple milks 120 cows, and grow only corn and haylage

on their 200 acres of land, west of Clinton, so they have to buy in straw for their total mixed ration.

Last year, with straw in short supply and prices rising, Van Esveld began looking for options and ended up trying switchgrass from a not-too-distant neighbour, Don Nott, as a replacement.

The switchgrass is chopped as it's harvested and pressed into 900 lb bales. It's ideal, says Van Esveld, "because I'm not set up to chop straw." He can scoop what he needs into the TMR mixer with his skid steer, and it's ideal for the dry cow herd, housed on a straw pack in a separate barn from the milking herd.

"If the switchgrass is clean, its

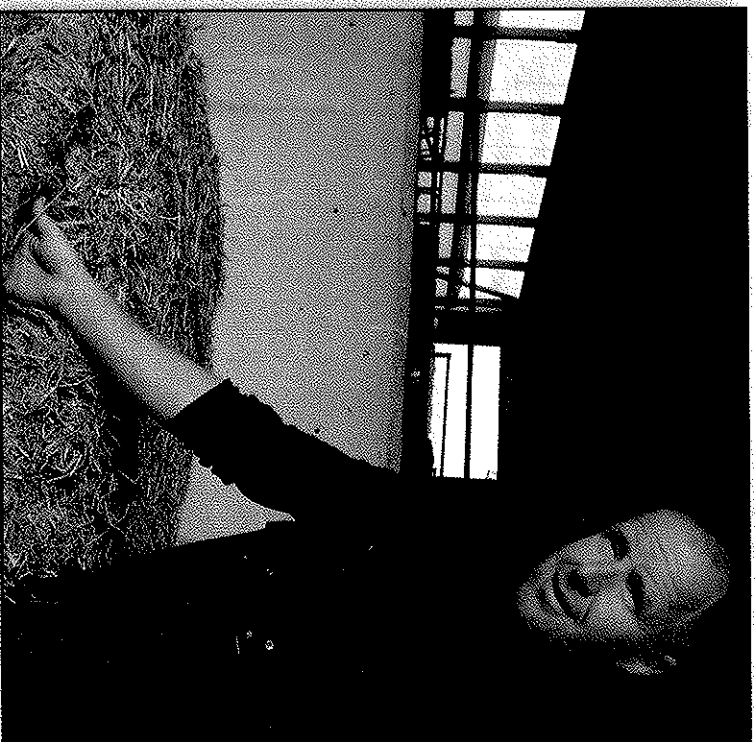
mineral and energy profile work really nice for dry cows," said Van Esveld's herd veterinarian, Ray Reynen, of Heartland Vet Services in Listowel.

The feed value of switchgrass is "really close to straw, and as long as it's clean enough, it works fine."

The potassium in wheat straw is about 1.4 per cent on a dry matter basis, and 91 per cent in switchgrass.

That's good, said Reynen, because "we're quite often struggling to get that low enough."

The protein in straw is 3.6 per cent dry matter, while switchgrass is 4 per cent, and the net energy level in straw is .97 per cent compared to 1.05 per cent in switchgrass.



Kees Van Esveld, Kesi Farms Clinton.