

The ,wonder grass‘ meant to boost dairy production – Brachiaria part 1

Milk production in Kenya is estimated to be between 1300 kg to 4575 kg per cow per year from various dairy breeds.

Variation in production is attributed by availability of high quality feeds , difference in animal breeds and production systems which in turn is influenced by agro-ecological zones. Brachiaria grass on the other hand is indigenous to Africa but has been growing wildly. It was recently improved to superior varieties and some promoted in Kenya. Brachiaria grass mulato 2 variety grows at a fast rate establishing itself in three months and can be harvested for the first time.

Feeding dairy

Dairy animal consumes 3% of its body weight of dry matter and from the 3% fodder constitutes about 98%. Adult dairy estimated 60 kg -100 kg concentrates intake of 2.2 kg and animal supplements of about 100 grams -150 grams.

Utilization of high quality fodder leads to high yields and lowers cost since feeds make up to 70% of production cost in a dairy system.

Growing Conditions

Brachiaria grass with its dark green blades produces seeds unlike napier. The grass grows up to 1.5 metres high in optimal soils and climatic conditions. Conditions are; areas with annual rainfall of above 700 mm and mean temperature not exceeding 19°C.

The grass grows well in most soils except for clay. It also

grows well in areas not exceeding 800 m – 1800 m below sea level for the best performance. As for napier grass, crude protein content is 7%- 10% compared to 18% crude protein in brachiaria grass.

Merits

The yields of brachiaria range between 18 tonnes-20 tonnes of green fodder per acre. When dried and baled as hay, it gives 8.5 tonnes-10 tonnes. Rod grass yields eight tonnes of green grass. Brachiaria is preferred and beneficial since it is high yielding foliage of 6 hectares-12 hectares per year.

It has a high fibre content and increases milk production by 40% , is drought tolerant for 5 -6 months. It can tolerate both alkaline and acidic soils and is pest and disease resistant.