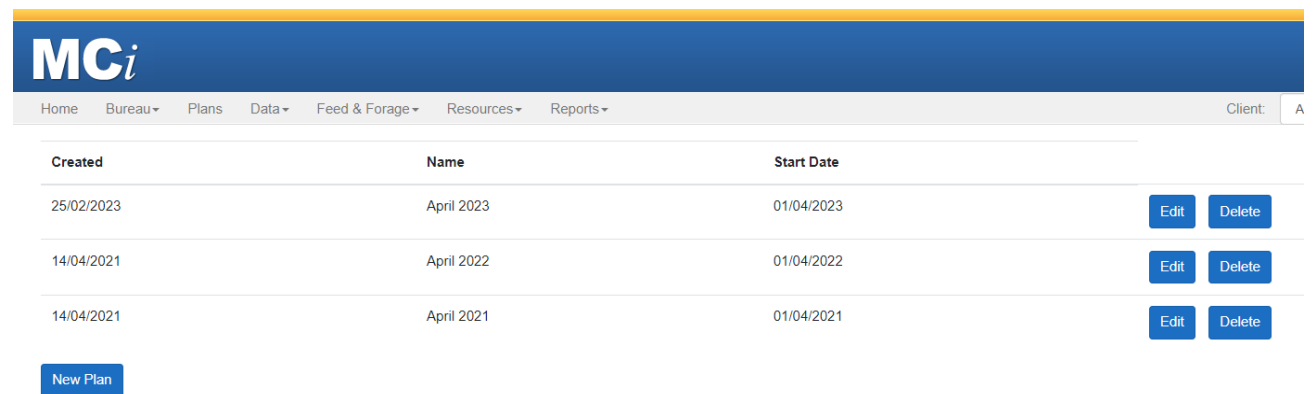**MCi forage plan guidance**

Before you start

Before starting a forage plan it is best to update the milk forecast as the cow numbers can be imported in to the forage plan.

Also you will need an assessment of forage stocks to provide the opening stocks to include in your forage plan.

You will need the planned area of forage crops to harvest in the next 12 months and an estimate of yield (tonnes of dry matter per ha).

New forage plan

Go to 'Feed & Forage' and select 'Forage Planner'. Any existing plans will be listed which can be edited or use 'New Plan' to create a new plan

For a new plan it is best to plan for 12 months. If you want to plan for 2 years just use the forecast forage stocks at the end of year 1 as the opening for year 2. There are 4 tabs (setup, plan, forage and production), but normally it is easier to just plan and NOT forage.

Setup

The categories of livestock are milking, dry and other. You can create more than one milking group, but easier to start with one. If there is an existing milk forecast you can populate the milking and dry cows by 'Import forecasted herd data'. For other livestock you may want 0-12 months, 12-24 months to cover dairy replacements and the same for beef if needed. There is a default dry matter intake, which can be amended.

Now add in the forage types (gass silage, maize and other, e.g. whole crop). You can use your own names, but they need to be linked to a forage type. Also enter the opening stock of silage (tonnes of DRY MATTER) if not populated from the 'forage assessment'. If you have a stock of bales these should also be included in the setup and the plan.

Plan

The plan is to enter the number of livestock by month (milking and dry cows can be populated from 'Import forecasted herd data' in the setup tab). You can copy livestock numbers forward by using 'Ctrl B' with the cursor in the cell to be copied. Now enter the kg DRY MATTER to be fed for each category of animal (use 'Ctrl B' to copy forward). The values used will be a starting point to be amended once you have produced an initial plan.

Production

This is to plan the forage crops to harvest and to see how this compares with the planned monthly requirement. Enter the hectares of each crop to harvest (e.g. 1st, 2nd, 3rd grass silage; maize; wholecrop, etc.) and the expected yield in tonnes DRY MATTER per Ha. Use your own yield data or use typical values, e.g. 1st cut use say 5tDM/ha, 2nd cut 3tDM/ha and 3rd cut 2tDM/ha. For maize and wholecrop cereals a typical yield is 10tDM/ha.

	Yield (tDM/ha)	Opening	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23
			Hectares Harvested							
Grass Silage										
1st cut	4.0			55.0						
2nd cut	2.5				49.0					
3rd cut	2.5					20.0				
Production (t DM)			0.0	220.0	122.5	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Requirement (t DM)			55.0	33.6	33.0	36.0	34.7	33.6	35.8	5
Planned Stocks (t DM)		202.0	147.0	333.4	422.9	436.9	402.2	368.6	332.8	27
Maize Silage										
Own maize	10.0								21.0	

Now look at the planned annual requirement compared to the planned annual production. The aim would normally be to produce what is required.

Next look at the monthly 'planned stocks' to see where the stock is negative or close to running out and how the stock of grass silage compares to maize and wholecrop. You may need to go back to the plan and adjust the amounts to be fed to produce a better plan. Recognise what is the limiting forage and plan accordingly. In late winter the plan could be to use up the grass silage by say the summer and to retain maize silage for feeding to transition cows and early calvers in August to October before the next maize is available to feed. Wholecrop can be a good 'gap filler' where there is a 'hole' in the forage plan.

NOW SAVE

Next steps

You should expect to update the forage plan in Spring and Autumn after the major forage harvests. Each time you carry out a 'Silage Assessment' the forage plan is updated with the actual and forecasted stocks. You could then edit the existing plan going forward to make an adjustment.