Components in the nutritive value of forages

To define the nutritive value of forages is more difficult than with most other farm feeds. The term "forage" includes feeds ranging from straw and browse plants, with a dry matter digestibility below 40%, to young immature grasses and legumes which may be more than 80% digestible; protein and mineral contents can vary very widely, in contrast to the more constant composition of the cereals and oil seeds; and the quantity of forage fed is seldom controlled--whereas cereal and oil-seed feeds are generally rationed--so that the factors in forage that determine how much of it animals will eat play an essential part in determining its nutritive value.

This has led to the recognition that in defining forage nutritive value we must be concerned with the factors determining nutrient intake, with the aim of producing forages and forage-based feeding systems which will allow high levels of nutrient intake, and so will give high levels of animal production. As discussed elsewhere (30), efficient land-use in the future will require most of our ruminant populations to be at much higher levels of production than at present, and this will often mean increasing the daily quantity of nutrients eaten.

Nutrient intake itself is a complex term, and it has proved useful, both in research on the subject and in trans-