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# **EVALUATION OF HERB PASTURES FOR NEW ZEALAND DAIRY SYSTEMS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Animal Sciences**

At Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand



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**2015**



I dedicate this Thesis to the memory of my wonderful grandma,

Mi abuelita Mary (1914 – 2015)

Thanks for your love and live so long for us







## ABSTRACT

Chicory (*Cichorium intybus* L.) and plantain (*Plantago lanceolata* L.) sown in pure swards or both herbs sown with red clover (*Trifolium pratense* L.) and white clover (*T. repens* L.) are able to produce large amounts of high-quality forage in summer and autumn, when production and quality of perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne* L.) are often limited. There have been many cases of poor persistence of chicory with current management practices, but there is limited information for plantain and the herb-clover mix pastures when grazed in dairy systems. Additionally, the presence of bioactive compounds in plantain has created interest in their potential effect on rumen fermentation. The objectives of this research were to evaluate the effect of grazing frequency, two and four weeks, on the agronomic characteristics and diet selection of chicory, plantain, and herb-clover mix pastures, with dairy cows during two growing seasons (2011-2012; 2012-2013) and to examine the effect of the bioactive compounds in plantain on *in vitro* rumen fermentation.

Chicory plants grazed every two weeks, rather than every four weeks, did not develop large taproots, and consequently stored less carbohydrate reserves (fructan and fructose) and failed to develop extra shoots. Chicory grazed every two weeks failed to persist, while chicory grazed every four weeks persisted only for the two growing seasons. For plantain the grazing frequency did not affect its plant density nor taproot diameter; however, the number of shoots per plant increased when grazed every two weeks compared to every four weeks. Overall, plantain and herb-clover mix pastures were more productive and persistent than chicory. The three pastures produced high-quality feed for dairy cows. Dairy cows preferred the herb-clover mix pasture, rather than pure chicory or plantain swards, and selected indiscriminately between chicory, plantain, and red clover. The diet selection for chicory and plantain varied between seasons and was affected by the vertical access and horizontal distribution of the species in the swards. The presence of bioactive compounds, aucubin and acteoside in plantain reduced the ammonia concentration during fermentation and probably causes less urea to be excreted in the cow's urine when grazing plantain. In conclusion, the herb-clover mix performed best due to its high herbage production and nutritive value and greater grazing preference by dairy cows, plus its potential to reduce the nitrogen lost from dairy systems.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my main supervisor, Professor Peter Kemp, for his great supervision, encouragement, and constant support over these years, and to my co-supervisors, Dr. Sarah Pain and Dr. Penny Back, for their advice, suggestions, critical comments and help through this work. I am very grateful for their guidance and friendliness throughout my study, and their role in the development of my future research career.

My special thanks to DairyNZ Limited for their financial assistance for the field experiment and to Massey University for funding the *in vitro* experiment. The field research was conducted on Massey University Dairy Farm No 1 and all animal experiments were carried out with animal ethics approval by Massey University.

My sincere thanks goes to all the people that helped and assisted me during the experimental work. Special thanks go for Mark Osborne and Simon Osborn for their great technician support during all field work, especially during the grazing days helping with the management of the cows, to Chris Rawlingson for his assistance in the secondary compounds analysis, and to Dr Zhao He for statistical advice. I would like to thank Simon for all his help during the behaviour experiment and Dr. Ina Draganova for her assistance in the use of global positioning system (GPS), data management, and use of ArcGis software. Thanks also to the internship students, Adriana, Nicole, Stefan, and Lars, and the summer students, Stacey, Nicole, and Lachlan for their help during the sampling days, they made those working days more enjoyable.

I would like to acknowledge the national commission for scientific and technological research (CONICYT) of Chile for the financial support by a Bicentennial Becas-Chile scholarship to study this PhD. I also acknowledge the financial support from Helen E. Akers PhD scholarship, John Hodgson Pastoral Science scholarship, and Seed Tech Services Scholarship for my study.

I also extend my thanks to both past and present fellow postgraduates, office mates, and friends for their friendship during my study at Massey University, particularly to Agneta, Sally, Florentine, Davood, Renzo, Eduardo, Javier, Ainul, Quinhua, Uschy, Minson, Tomoko, Dr. Tao Wang, Dr. Saman Herath, Dr. Lawrent Pungunali, Dr. Lydia Cranston, and others. I also thank my Chilean best friends for their lasting friendship and support from a distance, especially Alexandra, Pamela, Sole, Pilar, Coty, Francisco, Esteban, Tomas, and Diego.

I am very grateful of my wonderful family, my parents, Gaby and Carlos; my older brother, Carlos; my twin brother Mauricio; and my darling grandma, abuelita Mary for their continuous love, unconditional support, and always being present (24/7) despite the distance. You are priceless to me and all my achievements are undoubtedly thanks to all of you.

Finally, to Roberto thank for your understanding, unconditional support, help, and advice on how to cope with those stressful days of a PhD, and for being every day so loving with me. We found each other and coincide without thinking here in New Zealand, making my life so beautiful.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>XII</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....</b>	<b>XVII</b>
<b>1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 THESIS OBJECTIVES .....	5
1.2 THESIS STRUCTURE .....	5
1.3 REFERENCES.....	6
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY OF CHICORY AND PLANTAIN.....	11
2.1.1 Breeding of the herbs for pastoral grazing systems in New Zealand ....	12
2.2 AGRONOMIC FEATURES.....	15
2.2.1 Establishment .....	15
2.2.2 Growth and herbage production.....	16
2.3 NUTRITIVE VALUE.....	18
2.3.1 Protein .....	20
2.3.2 Fibre .....	21
2.3.3 Organic matter digestibility.....	22
2.3.4 Secondary compounds .....	23
2.4 ANIMAL PERFORMANCE .....	27
2.4.1 Feeding Value.....	27
2.4.2 Voluntary feed intake .....	30

2.5	PASTURE MANAGEMENT .....	32
	2.5.1 Stem development .....	32
	2.5.2 Pasture persistence .....	33
2.6	GRAZING MANAGEMENT .....	34
2.7	HERB-CLOVER MIX PASTURES .....	38
2.8	CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	39
2.9	REFERENCES .....	40

<b>3</b>	<b>EFFECT OF GRAZING FREQUENCY BY DAIRY COWS ON HERB BASED PASTURES THROUGHOUT TWO GROWING SEASONS .....</b>	<b>53</b>
3.1	ABSTRACT .....	57
3.2	INTRODUCTION .....	58
3.3	MATERIALS AND METHODS .....	60
	3.3.1 Experimental site and treatments .....	60
	3.3.2 Site preparation and sowing .....	61
	3.3.3 Grazing management .....	62
	3.3.4 Pasture management .....	63
	3.3.5 Sward measurements .....	64
	3.3.6 Statistical analysis .....	66
3.4	RESULTS .....	67
	3.4.1 Climatic conditions .....	67
	3.4.2 Herbage production .....	69
	3.4.3 Plant density and plant size .....	76
	3.4.4 Taproot development and carbohydrate of reserves .....	82
3.5	DISCUSSION .....	87
	3.5.1 Herbage Production .....	87
	3.5.2 Pasture persistence .....	89
	3.5.3 Root development and carbohydrate reserve .....	93
3.6	CONCLUSIONS .....	95
3.7	REFERENCES .....	96

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<b>4</b>	<b>NUTRITIVE VALUE OF HERB PASTURES GRAZED AT TWO GRAZING FREQUENCY THROUGHOUT TWO GROWING SEASONS .....</b>	<b>101</b>
4.1	ABSTRACT .....	103
4.2	INTRODUCTION.....	104
4.3	MATERIAL AND METHODS .....	106
4.3.1	Experimental design .....	106
4.3.2	Herbage measurements.....	107
4.3.3	Laboratory analysis.....	107
4.3.4	Statistical analysis.....	108
4.4	RESULTS.....	109
4.4.1	Dry matter .....	109
4.4.2	Metabolisable energy .....	110
4.4.3	Crude protein .....	112
4.4.4	Neutral detergent fibre and acid detergent fibre .....	114
4.4.5	Hot water soluble carbohydrates.....	121
4.4.7	Ash .....	124
4.5	DISCUSSION.....	126
4.6	CONCLUSIONS.....	130
4.7	REFERENCES.....	131
<b>5</b>	<b>SELECTIVE GRAZING OF CHICORY AND PLANTAIN IN PURE SWARDS OR IN MIXED SWARDS BY LACTATING DAIRY COWS .....</b>	<b>137</b>
5.1	ABSTRACT .....	139
5.2	INTRODUCTION.....	140
5.3	MATERIAL AND METHODS .....	142
5.3.1	Study One: Diet selection of dairy cows grazing a herb-clover mix pasture.....	142
5.3.2	Study Two: Diet selection of dairy cows grazing chicory, plantain or herb-clover mix pastures.....	145
5.3.3	Calculations and statistical analysis .....	150

5.4	RESULTS.....	154
5.4.1	Study One: Diet selection of dairy cows grazing a herb-clover mix pasture.....	154
5.4.2	Study Two: Grazing preference of dairy cows for chicory, plantain and herb-clover mix pastures .....	161
5.5	DISCUSSION.....	172
5.6	CONCLUSIONS.....	176
5.7	REFERENCES.....	177
<b>6</b>	<b>BIOACTIVE COMPOUNDS, AUCUBIN AND ACTEOSIDE, IN PLANTAIN AND THEIR EFFECT ON <i>in vitro</i> RUMEN FERMENTATION .....</b>	<b>183</b>
6.1	ABSTRACT .....	185
6.2	INTRODUCTION.....	186
6.3	MATERIAL AND METHODS .....	188
6.3.1	Plant material .....	188
6.3.2	<i>In vitro</i> experimental design .....	189
6.3.3	Calculations and statistical analysis .....	193
6.4	RESULTS.....	195
6.4.1	Secondary compounds in plantain .....	195
6.4.2	<i>In vitro</i> incubations .....	197
6.5	DISCUSSION.....	207
6.5.1	Bioactive compounds in plantain.....	207
6.5.2	<i>In vitro</i> fermentation .....	208
6.5.3	Ammonia production .....	211
6.6	CONCLUSIONS.....	213
6.7	REFERENCES.....	214
<b>7</b>	<b>OVERALL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>221</b>
7.1	OVERALL THESIS OBJECTIVE .....	222
7.2	PRODUCTION AND PERSISTENCE OF HERB PASTURES .....	223
7.2.1	Plant development .....	224

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7.3	FEED QUALITY SUPPLY .....	225
	7.3.1 Effect of plantain bioactive compounds on in vitro fermentation .....	228
7.4	LIMITATIONS OF THESIS STUDIES.....	229
7.5	FURTHER RESEARCH .....	230
7.6	MAIN CONCLUSIONS .....	231
7.7	REFERENCES.....	233



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Herbage production (t DM/ha) obtained for chicory and plantain, in New Zealand. ....	17
Table 2-2 Seasonal concentration (g/kg DM) of crude protein (CP), neutral detergent fibre (NDF), and organic matter digestibility (OMD) for chicory and plantain, in New Zealand. ....	19
Table 2-3 Secondary compounds present in chicory and plantain.....	24
Table 2-4 Liveweight gains (LWG) of lambs and deer grazing herbs species in comparison to perennial ryegrass pastures and milk production (milk/cow/d) of dairy cows supplemented with herb pastures. ....	29
Table 3-1 The pasture treatments and perennial ryegrass/white clover pasture, cultivars and sowing rates. ....	60
Table 3-2 Total monthly rainfall (mm), mean monthly maximum and minimum air temperature (°C), mean monthly soil temperature (°C) between October, 2011 and May, 2013 and long term average (LTA).....	68
Table 3-3 Net herbage mass accumulated (kg DM/ha) in the pasture treatments and perennial ryegrass/white clover pasture and when grazing the pasture treatments every two and every four week during the first (2011-2012) and second (2012-2013) growing seasons (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	69
Table 3-4 Taproot diameter (mm) of chicory and plantain (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ) in the pure swards and in the herb-clover mix pasture by grazing every two or every four week frequencies during the first (2011-2012) and second (2012-2013) growing seasons.....	83
Table 3-5 Concentration (mg/g DM) of fructose, glucose and sucrose in roots of chicory and plantain during the second (2012-2013) growing season.....	86

Table 4-1 Seasonal concentration (g/kg DM) of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin in chicory, plantain, and the herb-clover mix pastures and in perennial ryegrass/white clover and in the pasture treatments by grazing every two or four week frequencies during the first (2011-2012) and the second (2012-2013) growing seasons. ....	119
Table 5-1 Relative abundance (%) of plantain, chicory, red and white clover during late spring, summer, and autumn in the herb-clover mix swards .....	143
Table 5-2 Herbage mass (kg DM/ha) of the herb-clover mix pasture grazed every two or every four weeks during late spring, summer and autumn (Mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	156
Table 5-3 Percentage (%) of time spent in each behaviour activity during the morning (AM) and afternoon (PM) grazing times by dairy cows (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	161
Table 5-4 Herbage mass (kg DM/ha) in the chicory, plantain and herb-clover pastures and in summer, early and late autumn when grazed every two and every four weeks (Mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	164
Table 6-1 Summary of the chicory (CH) and plantain (PL) treatments and concentration (mg/g DM) of the aucubin (au) and acteoside (ac) tested. ....	190
Table 6-2 Concentration (mg/g DM) of catalpol, aucubin and acteoside in plantain (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	196
Table 6-3 Nutritive analysis of plantain and chicory from the four weeks grazing frequency plots, harvested in May, 2013 and used as substrate (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	197
Table 6-4 <i>In vitro</i> gas production parameters of the treatments after 24 h of incubation (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	199
Table 6-5 <i>In vitro</i> pH, total volatile fatty acid (VFA) concentration, molar proportion of individual VFA, ratio acetate to propionate (A:P), and ammonia (NH <sub>3</sub> ) concentration for chicory and plantain treatments after 24 h of incubation (mean $\pm$ SEM <sup>1</sup> ). ....	201

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 3-1 Monthly growth rate (kg DM/ha/day) in chicory (■), plantain (●), and herb-clover mix (▲) pasture. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM)..... 70
- Figure 3-2 Herbage mass pre-grazing (kg DM/ha) in: A) the pasture treatments grazed every two (dashed lines) and every four weeks (solid lines) throughout the first (December, 2011 to April, 2012) and second (August, 2012 to May, 2013) growing seasons, and in B) chicory (white), plantain (black), and the herb-clover mix (grey) pastures when grazing at two (2w) or four week (4w) frequencies in the first (2011-2012) and second (2012-2013) growing seasons. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). Values noted with *a*, *b*, *c* are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different in each growing season. .... 72
- Figure 3-3 Botanical composition (%) in A) chicory, B) plantain and C) the herb-clover mix pastures grazed every two (left) or every four week (right) frequencies throughout the first (2011-2012) and second (2012-2013) growing seasons. .... 75
- Figure 3-4. Plant density (plants/m<sup>2</sup>) of A) chicory in the pure sward (■) and in the herb-clover mix (▲) pasture and of B) plantain in the pure sward (●) and in the herb-clover mix (▲) pasture throughout the first (December, 2011 and May, 2012) and second (August, 2012; November, 2012; February, 2013; May 2013) growing seasons. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). .. 78
- Figure 3-5 Plant size (shoots/plant) of A) chicory plants in the pure sward (■) and in the herb-clover mix (▲) pasture and of B) plantain plants in the pure swards (●) and herb-clover mix pastures (▲) under a grazing frequency of two (dashed lines) and four (solid lines) weeks throughout the first (December, 2011 and May, 2012) and second (August, 2012; November, 2012; February, 2013; May, 2013) growing seasons. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). .. 80
- Figure 3-6 Monthly herbage mass contributed by chicory (kg DM/ha; column) in the pure swards grazed every two (dashed vertical) and every four (solid fill) week frequencies and shoot density (shoots/m<sup>2</sup>; lines) in the pure chicory swards by grazing every two (dashed lines) and every four (solid lines) week frequencies throughout the second (2012-2013) growing seasons. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). .... 81

- Figure 3-7 Fructan concentration (g/kg DM) in the roots of chicory (white) and plantain (black) in the pure swards (solid fill) and in the herb-clover mix (dashed horizontal) pasture throughout the second (2012-2013) growing season. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). <sup>a, b, c</sup> letters indicate values that are significant different ( $P < 0.05$ ) in each month. .... 85
- Figure 4-1 Seasonal concentration of A) dry matter (DM) and B) metabolisable energy (ME) in the chicory (■), plantain (●), and herb-clover mix (▲) pasture treatments and in the perennial ryegrass/white clover pasture (◆ dashed lines) during the first (2011-2012) and the second (2012-2013) growing season. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). \* indicate values that significantly differ ( $P < 0.05$ ) between chicory, plantain and herb-clover mix in each season..... 111
- Figure 4-2 Seasonal concentration of crude protein (CP) in A) chicory (■), plantain (●), and the herb-clover mix (▲) pasture treatments and in the perennial ryegrass/white clover pasture (◆ dashed lines) and B) in the pasture treatments by grazing every two (dashed line) or every four week (solid line) intervals during the first (2011-2012) and the second (2012-2013) growing season. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). \* indicate values that significantly differ ( $P < 0.05$ ) in each season. .... 113
- Figure 4-3 Seasonal concentration of A) neutral detergent fibre (NDF) and B) acid detergent fibre (ADF) in chicory (■), plantain (●), and herb-clover mix (▲) pasture treatments and in the perennial ryegrass/white clover pasture (◆ dashed lines) during the first (2011-2012) and the second (2012-2013) growing seasons. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). \* indicate values that significantly differ ( $P < 0.05$ ) in each season. .... 115
- Figure 4-4 Seasonal concentration of A) neutral detergent fibre (NDF) and B) acid detergent fibre (ADF) in the pasture treatments by grazing every two (dashed lines) or every four week (solid line) frequencies during the first (2011-2012) and second (2012-2013) growing seasons. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). \* Indicate values that significantly differ ( $P < 0.05$ ) in each season..... 117
- Figure 4-5 Seasonal concentration of hot water soluble carbohydrates (HWSC) in: A) chicory (■), plantain (●), and the herb-clover mix (▲) pasture treatments and in perennial ryegrass/white clover (◆ dashed lines) and in B) the pasture

treatments by grazing every two (dashed lines) or every four week (solid lines) frequencies during the first (2011-2012) and the second (2012-2013) growing season. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). * indicate values that significantly differ ( $P < 0.05$ ) in each season. ....	122
Figure 4-6 Seasonal ash content of: A) chicory (■), plantain (●), and the herb-clover mix (▲) pasture treatments and in perennial ryegrass/white clover (◆ dashed lines) pasture and in B) in the pasture treatments by grazing every two (dashed lines) or every four week (solid lines) frequencies during the first (2011-2012) and the second (2012-2013) growing season. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). * indicate values that significantly differ ( $P < 0.05$ ) in each season. ....	125
Figure 5-1 Distribution of the pasture treatments within block (I – IV). C2 = chicory grazed every two weeks, C4 = chicory grazed every four weeks, P2 = plantain grazed every two weeks, P4 = plantain grazed every four weeks, M2 = herb-clover mix grazed every two weeks, and M4 = herb-clover mix grazed every four weeks.....	146
Figure 5-2 A dairy cow fitted with a GPS collar .....	149
Figure 5-3 Selection index for chicory (■), plantain (●), red clover (▲) and white clover (◆) in a two-year old herb-clover mix pasture A) grazed every two or B) every four week frequencies by lactating dairy cows during late spring, summer and autumn Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). ....	155
Figure 5-4 Botanical composition in the herb-clover mix pasture grazed every two (2w) and every four (4w) weeks during late spring, summer and autumn. ....	157
Figure 5-5 Botanical composition (%) in the herb-clover mix during A) late spring, B) summer, and C) autumn when grazing every two (left) or every four weeks (right) in the lower (<7 cm), middle (7-20 cm) and upper (>20 cm) strata height....	160
Figure 5-6 Dairy cow preference as the percentage of the time spent grazing each chicory (white), plantain (black), and herb-clover mix (grey) pasture type when grazed every two (dashed vertical) or every four weeks (solid fill) during summer, early and late autumn. Vertical bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM). ....	163

- Figure 5-7 Herbage mass contribution (kg DM/ha) of different pasture components in A) chicory, B) plantain, and C) the herb-clover mix pastures grazed every two (left) and every four (right) week frequencies during summer, early and late autumn. ... 166
- Figure 5-8. Relationship between GPS recording of cows position and grazing preference of dairy cows during the morning grazing (AM) in the A) paddock I and B) paddock III and during the afternoon grazing (PM) in the C) paddock II and D) paddock IV, and E) the overall relationship, when the paddock IV was excluded..... 168
- Figure 5-9 Kernel density estimated for cows position as the percentage of cows per square meter in the pasture treatments within paddock (I – IV) during summer. C2 = chicory grazed every two weeks, C4 = chicory grazed every four weeks, P2 = plantain grazed every two weeks, P4 = plantain grazed every four weeks, M2 = herb-clover mix grazed every two weeks, and M4 = herb-clover mix grazed every four weeks. .... 169
- Figure 5-10 Kernel density estimated for cows position as the percentage of cows per square meter in the pasture treatments within paddock (I – IV) during early autumn. C2 = chicory grazed every two weeks, C4 = chicory grazed every four weeks, P2 = plantain grazed every two weeks, P4 = plantain grazed every four weeks, M2 = herb-clover mix grazed every two weeks, and M4 = herb-clover mix grazed every four weeks..... 170
- Figure 5-11 Kernel density estimated for cows position as the percentage of cows per square meter in the pasture treatments within paddock (I – IV) during late autumn. C2 = chicory grazed every two weeks, C4 = chicory grazed every four weeks, P2 = plantain grazed every two weeks, P4 = plantain grazed every four weeks, M2 = herb-clover mix grazed every two weeks, and M4 = herb-clover mix grazed every four weeks..... 171
- Figure 6-1 Production (mmol/g DM) over time of A) acetate, B) propionate, and C) total VFA in all the *in vitro* treatments: CH, chicory; CH+10au, chicory+10 mg aucubin/g DM; CH+20au, chicory+20 mg aucubin/g DM; CH+40ac, chicory+40 mg acteoside/g DM; PL, plantain (containing endogenous levels of 7 mg aucubin/g DM and 36 mg acteoside/g DM); PL+10au, plantain+extra 10 mg aucubin/g DM; PL+36ac, plantain+extra 36 mg acteoside/g DM. Bars denoting standard error of the mean (SEM) at each time point are included at the top of each figure. .... 203

- Figure 6-2 Production (mmol/g DM) over time of A) butyrate and of B) branched VFA (isobutyrate and isovalerate) in all the *in vitro* treatments: CH, chicory; CH+10au, chicory+10 mg aucubin/g DM; CH+20au, chicory+20 mg aucubin/g DM; CH+40ac, chicory+40 mg acteoside/g DM; PL, plantain (containing endogenous levels of 7 mg aucubin/g DM and 36 mg acteoside/g DM); PL+10au, plantain+extra 10 mg aucubin/g DM; PL+36ac, plantain+extra 36 mg acteoside/g DM. Bars denoting standard error of the mean (SEM) at each time point are included at the top of each figure..... 204
- Figure 6-3 Net ammonia (mmol NH<sub>3</sub>/g DM) production for A) chicory *in vitro* treatments: CH, chicory; CH+10au, chicory+10 mg aucubin/g DM; CH+20au, chicory+20 mg aucubin/g DM; CH+40ac, chicory+40 mg acteoside/g DM; PL, plantain (containing endogenous levels of 7 mg aucubin/g DM and 36 mg acteoside/g DM); PL+10au, plantain+extra 10 mg aucubin/g DM; PL+36ac, plantain+extra 36 mg acteoside/g DM. Bars denoting standard error of the mean (SEM) at each time point are included at the top of each figure..... 206
- Figure 6-4 Chemical structure of A) aucubin and B) acteoside..... 210

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

A	Potential of gas production
Ac	Acteoside
ADF	Acid detergent fibre
AM	Morning
Au	Aucubin
BCVFA	Branched chain volatile fatty acids
CH	Chicory
CH+10au	Chicory plus 10 mg aucubin/g DM
CH+20au	Chicory plus 20 mg aucubin/g DM
CH+40ac	Chicory plus 40 mg acteoside/g DM
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
CP	Crude protein
CT	Condensed tannins
DM	Dry matter
DMI	Dry matter intake
ELH	Extended leaf height
FV	Feeding value
GIS	Geographic Information System
GP	Gas production
GPS	Global Positioning System
HPLC	High-performed liquid chromatography
HWSC	Hot water soluble carbohydrates
LAI	Leaf area index
LTA	Long term average
LW	Live weight



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ME	Metabolisable energy
MeOH	Methanol
N	Nitrogen
N <sub>2</sub> O	Nitrous oxide
NDF	Neutral detergent fibre
NH <sub>3</sub>	Ammonia
OM	Organic matter
OMD	Organic matter digestibility
PL	Plantain
PL+10au	Plantain plus 10 mg aucubin/g DM
PL+36ac	Plantain plus 36 mg acteoside/g DM
PM	Afternoon
R <sup>1/2A</sup>	Fermentation rate at T <sup>1/2A</sup>
RA	Relative abundance
RFC	Readily fermentable carbohydrates
SC	Structural carbohydrate
Si	Selection index
T <sup>1/2A</sup>	The half time when the potential gas production was reached
V <sub>24h</sub>	Volume of gas produced after 24 h incubation
VFA	Volatile fatty acid
VFI	Voluntary feed intake
WSC	Water soluble carbohydrate

## **1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

