



Pasture Quality Trend (February 2017)

We have had reasonably steady rain throughout this season. However, things are starting to get dry now with most irrigators flat out to keep up with demand. Pasture production will start to slow in the coming months, so it is advisable to start looking at pushing some pasture ahead of you which can be mined into these slow growing months.

Dry Matter (DM) (%)

DM% has increased since the extraordinarily low dry matters we saw in September through to November. It is sitting steady around the 18-20% mark. At the moment, the plate meter should be fairly accurate as it is calibrated for a dry matter of 18% in the pasture, and DM% should remain steady through the autumn as pasture is back into the vegetative, growing phase. Some areas where irrigation is under pressure the DM% is higher, and the plate meter will under-estimate pasture covers

Crude Protein (CP) (%)

Crude Protein has increased from the usual drop in protein percentage, and availability, we see through the dry summer months. There is now very little need to be feeding expensive protein supplements to maintain an adequate level of protein in the diet. Most farms will be seeing milk ureas (MU) climbing up from the lower (deficient) levels we saw through December and January. The increasing MU is a combination of both increasing protein (and availability), and lowering demand as the cows fall from peak. This will generally reduce as more supplement is fed to push pasture covers out in front as we head towards winter.

Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) (%)

NDF levels have maintained their frustratingly high level throughout this season. High NDF means that pasture will be of lower degradability, and cows will not be able to fit as much in. In short, cows will eat less of a lower quality feed. Some farms have seen the NDF level drop, which has meant that cows can eat more pasture (or supplement) and maintain production better. The key from now on out is to maximise and maintain the kgDM intake of cows to reduce the rate of decline so cows are still producing well, and profitably into May.

Metabolisable Energy (MJME/kg DM)

ME has recovered since the reproductive stage. This is a result of the lignin content in the pasture decreasing, driving up the degradability. This has meant that the cows can get more energy out of each kg of pasture consumed, which has held, or driven up production on the cows that were slightly underfed earlier. We have not seen the typical 12+ MJME/kgDM levels that we have seen other years, which seems to be a follow through from the poor pasture quality we had in spring. It is expected to increase now into the autumn, with more vegetative growth in the pasture. But even an increase from 11.7 that we have now, to 12.5 MJME/kgDM will not make up for the cows being half a kg short of feed. So, make sure that your cows are consistently fully fed, and they will reward you.

BCS should be sitting around 4.6-4.7 now and still gaining 0.1 BCS per month. Relying on fodder beet to make up the difference does not seem to be working, especially looking at empty rates and 6 week in calf rates around the country. Phosphorus supplementation should be a big focus for anyone feeding beet as the impact of P deficiency has been severely underestimated.