



Pasture Quality Trend (Oct - Nov 2017)

We have had plenty of moisture this spring, which has followed a wet winter. In most cases there is plenty of moisture deeper in the soil, but the pasture, which has had moisture on tap all spring, does not look as if it has rooted down very far. This seems to be translating to water stress with this hot spell we are in, and pasture is stemming up very quickly. The seed head will be well and truly on us within 10 days, which always seems to be right on that Canterbury show weekend.

Dry Matter (DM) (%)

DM% has been good throughout the spring and we have not seen many excessively low dry matters that we saw last season. This has limited the need to mow in front of the cows. Pre-graze mowing limits the cow's ability to sort past the seed head, and will now have a negative influence on palatability will only serve to limit intake. If residuals need to be controlled, then some post graze mowing will be needed to maintain quality throughout the seed head stage, so we can hold production high.

Crude Protein (CP) (%)

Crude Protein has been reasonable to date and it should have not be limiting production. In some individual cases we are already seeing milk ureas drop with the presence of seed head. Protein will begin to be locked up in the grass as is stems up, so heading forward many herds will be deficient in protein and production will suffer before the quality comes back in the autumn. Adding a rumen degradable source of protein is starting to make its way into some higher producing rations to maintain production and ensure a successful mating. Be careful of tests that still give a good CP%, as not all of this will be available. Pay attention to your cows, their production data, and their manure.

Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) (%)

NDF levels have been much better than last season, and many farms will see a more profitable protein to fat ratio as the fat % is not as high due to the increased fibre. Fibre has slid back during spring, but on average, we did not get as low as we have in previous seasons. With a high NDF%, pasture intake will be lower. There is a finite amount of NDF a cow can consume on a daily basis, so if your pasture is high in NDF, then total DM intake is reduced. This means that total energy intake is lower, and production, BCS, reproduction, or all three, will suffer. For some farms, this is the second season in a row where cows have failed to fire due to higher than normal NDF% in the pasture. If this is the case on your farm, then ensure that there is enough energy in the diet to secure a successful mating.

Metabolisable Energy (MJME/kg DM)

ME is looking very good for most farms. It is tightly correlated with NDF, and as NDF increases, degradability reduces, reducing ME. Most pastures have been testing over 12.0 MJME, however, as the seed head comes through, NDF will rise and ME will drop. Don't be mistaken in thinking that cows will drop a little in production due to mating, which is now under way. It is because the pasture starts losing quality about the same time mating gets going. Don't rely on intervention to pull you through mating, target the reason for anoestrus at the source which is generally nutritionally based. A well-balanced ration, providing the energy the cows need will give any intervention program good results.

We have been busy with a number of enquiries where farmers are not seeing cows peaking well, and are concerned with initial mating results. If you feel that your cows are behind the 8-ball, you're not the only ones. It's not too late to give us a bell and we will be more than happy to help you get back on track.