



Pasture Quality Trend (October 2019)

Winter has continued well into September and October this season with much lower than normal air and soil temperatures. While the daytime highs started increasing towards the end of September, the overnight lows remained unseasonably low which has limited the gain in soil temperature. Over the last week, both soil temperature and overnight temperatures have started to increase and the result has been a boom of growth across the region. Some lighter soils are starting to get dry and the odd irrigator has been seen running. Caution is advised as bore water will drop soil temperature and this may be more detrimental to growth than some slight dry stress.

Dry Matter (DM) (%)

DM has persisted to stay high, between 18 and 20% through early spring, this has been helpful for many farms that were tight for average pasture cover, as the cows were telling us there was more in the paddock than measured, and they were content on lower measured covers that would have normally had them hungry and waiting at the gate.

As growth has started to ramp up now, we can expect that DM% in the plant will decrease and some pre-graze mowing may be necessary to maintain intake. There are some very specific circumstances that will justify mowing ahead of the cows. It is important not to mow poor quality feed into the diet as mowing reduces much of the selective ability of the cow and her diet is more likely to drop in quality if lots of stem or thatch residual are mown.

Crude Protein (CP) (%)

Protein levels took a dive through August/September and many farms saw very low MU levels. This is not always a bad thing so long as protein is not limiting production, it just means the cows are extracting more protein from their diet, however in many cases I saw with low MU levels, production was being limited by the quality of the 1st round pasture. Be careful of not taking too much cover through the winter and having a large bank of feed of poor-quality pasture in front of the cows through spring.

Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) (%)

NDF has hit its normal lows through this spring despite the slow start. Heavy late frosts will have resulted in a drop in NDF in the plant and we saw several farms crash in fat test with no other changes to the cow's diets over several of these frost/snow events. The low NDF this spring is good news for the quality of the feed heading forward. The quality of what is left of the spring flush should be excellent and finally it appears that the quantity is here now too. Be sure to monitor and manage residuals around the 1600 mark to ensure that next round is high quality as we start to head towards the seed head stage and once again declining pasture quality.

Metabolisable Energy (MJME/kg DM)

The ME for most pastures has been excellent this spring. The ME trend is reflected in the NDF trend and as both become more favourable, the total DM intake of the cow increases, as does the energy density. A great rising plane of nutrition of quality and quantity as we head into mating.