

## *Managing your livestock farm during a challenging spring*

### WE ARE HERE TO HELP

Spring 2018 will be remembered as a challenging period for all farms. Poor weather has led to difficult grazing conditions, poor grass growth and this is compounded by rapidly declining silage reserves. At this point, it is important to stay positive and not make rash decisions, especially as the breeding season is around the corner. Declining silage stocks, poor weather, reduced farm gate prices and rising costs from

extra feed will challenge your daily stamina but remember it is only five years since we dealt with similar situations on farms and we weathered that storm with no long term impact on animal performance. Our Sales Representatives and Ruminant Support Specialists are freely available to offer advice that is tailored to your farm. Pick up the phone and we can help you work through this difficult time.

### FORAGE SUPPLY

Low grass covers and poor growth rates have delayed turn out to grass and silage is still making up a significant part of the diet. Take measures to stretch existing silage and ensure you have enough forage available on your farm. March grass growth was almost non-existent running at < 10 kgs DM/ha/day resulting in low grass covers on both grazed and un-grazed swards. The large majority of livestock farmers have identified grass shortages for the next few weeks.

Our Ruminant Support Specialists are available to help you to do a check on your silage supplies. Here are some tips to help you over the next few weeks:

- Stretch existing silage stocks by using Fodder Stretcher Ration or mid-day buffer feeds.
- As temperatures increase, spread fertiliser to accelerate grass growth.
- As 90 % of Irish soils tested have shown a deficiency in either P, K or low pH, make sure to use compound fertiliser unless your recent soil results show a high index (3+4) for P and K.
- Walk your paddocks and begin to measure grass. We can help you form a plan.
- Assess the cover on the first paddock grazed – most have a cover of 500 kgs DM/ha and a target of 1200 kgs DM/ha before being grazed.

- Think about silage for 2019- Silage ground needs to be fertilised and closed off now to ensure that you meet the May cutting date. Buffer feed extra ration now and target fields for silage even if they are not grazed.
- Spray silage ground for weeds to improve sward quality. The approach will be different on farms but there are a few options to be considered:
  - o Bring in extra ground to the grazing block if possible and get young stock to an out-farm.
  - o Zero graze out blocks where grass and the facility are available.
  - o To save silage reserves, turn out young stock to a sheltered, dry field and feed outdoors with 3kgs Heifer Rearer or Weanling Cubes.
  - o Increase parlour feeding to dairy cows to reduce demand – see Table 1.
  - o Introduce an alternative forage or feed Bretts Fodder Stretcher Ration to reserve silage for priority stock. E.g. milking cows.
  - o Sell surplus stock to reduce demand for silage and grass Eg. dry cows, cull cows.
  - o Forward store cattle/young bulls that were meant to be turned out to grass and feed and build up to ad-lib.

## FEEDING GUIDELINES FOR DAIRY COWS

Remain flexible and adjust feeding levels depending on silage available, grazing conditions, grass supply, cow body condition score and milk yield. The circumstances will vary from farm to farm.

Decide what 'Farm' best describes your own situation and follow the column below. Talk to your Brett's Sales Rep to discuss the issues on your own farm:

Table 1

	APRIL 2018			
	FARM A	FARM B	FARM C	FARM D
Scenario on Farm	No Grass + Ad-lib 68% DMD Silage	No Grass + Limited Supplies of 68% DMD Silage	Limited Grass + 68% DMD Silage	Limited Grass + NO silage
Daily Grass Utilised Dry matter (kgs DM/cow/day) (must allocate more)	No Grass	No Grass	6	8
Silage – 68% DMD silage @ 22% Dry Matter	45 Kgs* Fresh Silage	33 Kgs* Fresh Silage	27 kgs* Fresh silage	Offer Silage if available
Straw/Hay (Maximum 1.5 Kg Straw to milking cows)	Optional Hay/Straw	Offer 1Kg Straw/Hay	Optional Hay/Straw	Offer 1.5 Kg Straw/Hay
Total Supplementation For 27 Litres from Parlour and/or Buffer Feed	Total of 9 Kgs	Total of 11 Kgs	Total of 6.5 Kgs	Total of 10 Kgs
Parlour Feed	9 Kgs Milkwell or Milk Max	8 Kgs Milkwell or Milk Max	6.5 Kgs Of Ultra Dairy 16 or PIP Spring Dairy	6.5 Kgs Of Ultra Dairy 16 or PIP Spring Dairy
Buffer Feed Mid-day with Fodder Stretcher Ration (feed at barrier or troughs)	(can offer some of the 9 kgs as buffer)	3 Kgs	-	3.5Kgs
Daily Yield Supported	27 Litres Or 2 kgs Milk Solids	27 Litres Or 2 kgs Milk Solids	27 Litres Or 2 kgs Milk Solids	27 Litres Or 2 kgs Milk Solids

## PRODUCT FOCUS

### Brett's Fodder Stretcher Ration

This 16% protein, high fibre ration is carefully formulated to fill the gap in Dry Matter Intake resulting from limited supplies of grass and/or silage. It is competitively priced at €220/ton and approximately 1 kg will replace 4 kgs of pit silage (at 22% dry matter). For dairy cows, it does NOT replace the existing parlour feed. Instead, it is offered to cows on top of silage or at the feed barrier. If you do not have sufficient feed space, offer the ration in troughs in yards or if grazing conditions improve this could also be fed under the strip wire until grass covers build up. For weanlings over 6 months of age and store cattle going to grass, the Fodder Stretcher Ration can be used to feed with limited silage or straw. Young calves should not be fed Fodder Stretcher Ration. Instead, use Brett's Ultra Calf or Heifer Rearer Feed alongside straw. Intensively fed finishing beef animals should be on a specific beef finishing ration and increase feed slowly to ad-lib, using straw or a small amount of silage as a roughage source. In extreme situations where there is no forage available, this Fodder Stretcher Ration could be fed to finishing beef animals, however please seek technical advice from your Brett Representative first.



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