



STRATEGIC GRASS MANAGEMENT FOR THE AUTUMN

While grass growth has been good, weather in late August has been challenging, and the high level of rainfall has made grazing conditions difficult. It is now more essential than ever to focus on the next few months and plan for autumn grazing.

A successful autumn grazing season will result in two positive outcomes; (1) it extends the grazing late into November, (2) it ensures your farm is set up for the first-round of 2021 spring grazing.

This process takes careful planning. It starts by increasing pre-grazing covers in mid-August thereby building grass on the farm and increasing rotation length. Remember, the target is to have enough grass built up by early-October so you can graze every day from 10th October to 20th November, without running out of grass. Bear in mind that late autumn has poor growth, so build to a peak farm grass cover in mid-late September while growth is good. To achieve this, extend your grazing rotation from 25 to 30 days in mid-late August and to 35 to 40 days by mid-late September. We recommend beginning your final rotation from 10th October and aim to have grazed 60% of ground by 1st November, stretching the remaining 40% to late November, depending on ground conditions.

GRASS QUALITY

The wet weather reduced grass dry matter to 12-14% on average in late August and as low as 11% on some farms. Low grass dry matter dramatically reduces grass intake and leads to very empty looking cows, both in terms of rumen fill and gut fill. With grass at 13% dry matter, a cow must consume 115 kgs of fresh (and wet) grass to achieve 15 kgs of dry matter intake. On very wet and inclement days, this is not achievable for many cows. When grass dry matter intakes are affected the overall energy intake from grass decreases, and supplementation should be increased to make up the deficit accordingly.

Grass quality is reasonably good with energy at 11.6MJ/kg DM, crude protein at 24.3%, sugars at 6.4% and fibre (NDF) at 47.9%. Oil levels in grass remain very high at 6.1% (similar to levels we experienced in 2018 following the drought conditions) and continue to be a cause of reduced milk fat levels on some farms.

Our Ruminant Support Specialists are out on farms and at present we estimate a realistic dry matter intake to be 14 kgs DM on very wet days and milk yield being supported from grass is approximately 16.5 litres for 14 kgs dry matter intake. Milk yield is slipping where supplementation is not being introduced and in some cases milk protein % is falling which is an indicator of an energy deficit.

A supplementation of 2 kgs per cow per day will support 20 litres of milk. If a cow is capable of producing 24 litres, we are recommending that 4 kgs of parlour feed should be fed to support yield and avoid excessive loss of body condition.



HARVEST UPDATE

Weather conditions for August harvesting have been challenging, yet tillage farmers have taken every opportunity available to them to cut crops where possible. Grain quality remains good, albeit moisture results are higher than previous years and yields have been adversely affected, due to the inclement weather and difficult harvesting conditions.

Intensive Feeding of Beef Finishers

Beef animals intended for intensive feeding will have a transitional feeding period of approximately 3 weeks when the level of concentrate increases gradually, while the amount of silage or forage is reduced. This can often be a challenging period for farmers, with the risk of acidosis, however with good management and the correct selection of feed, cattle will settle into high feeding rates very quickly.

Tips for a stress-free transitional period to ad-libitum feeding:

- Do not overstock pens. Animals will get bigger while in these pens and need adequate feeding and lying space.
- Straw bedded sheds or peat moss give the best performance, although most cattle are housed on slats, if available use rubber slats.
- Check water supply daily and clean out drinkers.
- Good ventilation is critical. Clip a strip of hair up the back to reduce 'sweating' in sheds.
- At housing, offer animals an abundance of silage and straw.
- Select a suitable feed for ad-lib feeding. We recommend using feed additives in conjunction with careful raw material selection. Buffers and yeast are proven to maintain rumen pH, reducing the risk of acidosis, loose dung and subsequent lameness.
- Introduce feed at no more than 3 kgs per head per day. Make sure every animal can get to the trough. As a rule of thumb, increase feed rate by 1 kg every third day and once you reach 5 kgs, feed cattle twice a day. Continue to offer an unlimited supply of good quality forage; grass silage and straw. As concentrate levels increase, the volume of forage eaten will decline.
- Suitable feeds for transitional and ad-lib feeding are Bretts Supreme Beef Cubes, Beef Elite Cubes, Coarse Beef and Coarse Bull Ration. Discuss your system with a member of the Bretts technical team.



PRODUCT FOCUS

Autumn Dairy Boost 15%

As the weather becomes more autumnal and dairy farmers begin to stretch grass rotations, the parlour feeding levels will increase. This year we have Autumn Dairy Boost Cubes formulated to 15% protein to complement high protein grass, while providing a good source of energy. This cube is ideal as a follow on from the summer grazing cubes as it offers a flexible feeding rate of 3 kgs to provide magnesium and minerals, and can be fed up to 7 kgs. Ask your Sales Representative for more information.



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