



THE CHALLENGES OF GRASS

March and April have been challenging months on man and beast! Excessive rain, poor grazing conditions, delays to sowing and fieldwork, late turnout of drystock and rehousing of many dairy herds has added to the stress on farms this spring. Hopefully May will bring a bit of 'kindness' and a normal growth pattern for our tillage crops, grass and silage fields.



Checklist for Milk Protein and Butterfat

April 2023 has been a busy month for our technical team fielding calls regarding low milk protein. Spring calving herds normally report a dip in milk protein % in late spring, this is due to milk yield increasing which has a dilution effect on milk protein %. This year the protein drop has been more pronounced, lasting for a longer period due to limited access to grass, the inclusion of poor quality silage in the diet and in some instances, underfeeding of concentrates relative to milk yield.

Below is a checklist to consider when managing milk protein:

- Assess daily total dry matter (DM) intake as energy deficiency is the main cause of low milk protein %.
- Be cautious not to overestimate the DM intake from grass. In a few days the DM of grass could change from 20% to 13%.
- Seek advice if milk ureas are continually lower than 18 as low milk ureas can indicate a shortage of protein in the diet. In April 2023 our Grass Watch results show that the grass protein levels are lower than previous years.
- Check the calibration of parlour feeders. A difference of 1 kg equates to 2 litres of milk.
- In poor grazing conditions, grass intakes decline. Increase parlour feeding or offer silage as an additional energy source on wet days.

In late April and May some herds experience a crash in butterfat and 'cows eating stones!'. To date butterfat has held relatively steady, as grass growth is slow and quality is more typical of March grass. However, once grass growth improves there will be a decline in the fibre content of grass and an increase in the oil content, which is high risk for depressing butterfat.

Brett's Supreme Breeder Cubes offer a nutritional solution to minimise the extent of the butterfat drop on lush leafy grass. As standard these cubes include our Performance Improvement Pack (PIP) of protected minerals, biotin and essential oils to improve the utilisation of grass protein. In addition they include extra fibre sources and are fortified with higher levels of phosphorus, rumen buffers and yeasts. The key to success is to watch the forecast and start feeding **Supreme Breeder Cubes** before hitting a round of lush, leafy fast growing grass.



PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PACK (PIP)



HOOF HEALTH



FERTILITY



RUMEN FUNCTION



MILK PRODUCTION

What is 'Summer Scour Syndrome' in Calves?

Many farms experience issues with calves and lambs showing symptoms of nutritional stress on grass. Farmers, vets and nutritionists are baffled as to how a group of healthy lambs or calves could be decimated within a few weeks of turnout with severe scour leading to dehydration and rapid weight loss. The term for this is 'Summer Scour Syndrome' but it can happen any time. Indeed we have seen cases in recent weeks.

The transitioning of any animal from an indoor environment of a dry, fresh bed to an outdoor environment combined with a change of diet from silage, straw or hay to lush, leafy grass that is high in nitrogen is a nutritional challenge. If a young animal is stressed their immune system is adversely affected and this can lead to an increased incident of scour and pneumonia. Stressed calves are prone to picking up coccidiosis and if your farm has a history, discuss a plan with your vet to try and get ahead of the problem. Brett's have a nutritional solution that can help reduce the risk of coccidiosis but veterinary intervention may also be required.

A solution for Summer Scour Syndrome - Extra Health Package


EXTRA

If your farm has experienced issues with Summer Scour, ask your Brett's Sales Representative about our Extra Health package. Based on years of experience our Nutritionist, Heather Peppard, has formulated a unique blend of feed additives to improve the performance of youngstock at grass. The Extra Health package reduces the risk of acidosis and includes an essential oil that has been used for the last number of years to provide a natural solution to boosting the animals ability to cope with coccidial challenge. Brett's Extra Health package is growing in popularity for the grazing period when lambs and calves are most prone to developing health issues after turnout.

Practical advice on transitioning calves to grass

In recent years our Ruminant Support Team have been advising customers on how to slowly transition weaned calves to grass. Farmers that have adopted this practice have reported a noticeable improvement in thrive with less 'sick calves and unexplained scours.'

- Introduce Brett's calf feed before turnout, calves should be eating at least 1 to 1.5 kgs, our calf feeds include a rumen buffer to reduce the risk of acidosis.
- Choose a paddock near the yard and one that has not received an application of nitrogen in the previous 4 weeks or consider grazing a Multi Species Sward which has higher fibre content.
- Keep the group size small.
- Transition calves to grass slowly over a few weeks, preferably grazing by day and offer access to a roofed sheltered area at night or a paddock with hedging for shelter.
- Feed calves at the same time every day and while herding check for the onset of illness.
- Do not reduce concentrate feed levels for the first month after turnout, even if the weather is 'good' the DM of grass is low compared to the indoor diet.
- Ensure access to clean drinking water.
- Offer straw as a consistent source of roughage.



Ruminant Support Specialist David Lawrence's ingenious idea of using a re-cycled IBC tank to keep straw fresh and dry.

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