



Despite a very wet and inclement January spring is upon us! In our region January rainfall is well over 120mls and in more localised areas it is much higher. February is a very busy month on most farms due to cows calving and ewes lambing, and while it is lovely to see lots of new life, it can be a tiring and stressful time. If you experience any nutritional problems on farm and feel that you need support, please seek advice from our team.

Growing conditions over the winter have been excellent and winter sown crops are well established with good grass covers ahead for livestock farms. Hopefully less rain and better weather conditions are not too far away for spring fieldwork and grazing to commence.

Milk Fever

Despite farms putting in lots of effort and resources to preventing Metabolic Diseases with Dry Cow Mineral programmes we have seen an increased incidence of 'teething problems' on many farms with sub-clinical milk fever being more prevalent than last year. Milk Fever normally occurs close to calving or within the first few days after calving. The cause is a reduced concentration of blood calcium known as Hypocalcaemia. The disease may be more prominent in herds with a high degree of jersey genetics, cows calving with excess body condition and older cows. If a cow goes down this is a clinical case. Sub-clinical cases are those where the cow struggles on but will show other problems such as slow calving or retained placenta.

- Most cases occur one day after calving due to colostrum draining blood calcium reserves. As a result, cows require additional supplementation via injection or high concentration of oral calcium (Reviva) or a Calcium Bolus

- The dry cow diet is important in reducing the risk of milk fever as it 'tunes' the cow's metabolism for efficient calcium absorption. During the dry period, a cow requires magnesium and vitamin D3 which 'programs' the cow to put calcium away in reserve for post calving
- Silages high in potash (greater than 2.5% K) may interfere with calcium mobilisation and increase the risk of milk fever. At Bretts we have magnesium chloride available, however seek technical advice from our team for appropriate rates to suit your farm
- Fatter cows are at a greater risk than thinner cows. This is partly because their feed and calcium intake has been higher and because fatter cows produce more milk at calving time by 'milking off their back'

Calving 2026

The focus for every dairy and suckler farmer is having a healthy, fertile and productive cow with a viable calf. Optimizing the use of grass in the dairy system while not underfeeding the cow in early lactation is the cornerstone of good fertility and the aim is to minimise body condition loss in the first six weeks after calving. Above all we wish everyone a safe and successful calving period this spring.

How much and what concentrate to feed?

Concentrate feeding levels should be flexible according to herd demand, weather and your overall forage budget. The table below outlines recommended feeding levels depending on forage available and milk yield.

Do not overestimate grass dry matter intakes as freshly calved cows need to transition to grass slowly, and silage should still make up some of the diet to achieve good dry matter intakes.

Recommended concentration supplementation depending on milk yield (assume average 68% DMD Silage):

| Forage Available | What Dairy Cube to feed | Milk Yield | | |
|--|---|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | 22 Litres | 26 Litres | 30 Litres |
| Indoors fulltime on 68% DMD Silage | Milkwell 18% Milk Max 18% | 7.0 Kgs | 8.0 Kgs | 9.0 Kgs |
| Grass by day (6kg DM) Adlib 68% DMD Silage by night | Milkwell/Milk Max 18% PIP Spring/Ultra Dairy 16% | 6.0 Kgs | 7.0 Kgs | 8.0 Kgs |

This table gives an approximate guideline. For detailed recommendations, contact your local Bretts Sales Representative"



The 5 'Cs' of Successful Calf Rearing

Colostrum: Remember the 1,2,3 Rule – the first feed of colostrum should be given within the first two hours of birth and a minimum of three litres.

Comfort: Calves need a dry, draught free, warm bed with plenty of straw and good ventilation.

Consistency: Feed calves at the same time each day and ensure milk replacer is measured accurately.

Cleanliness: All milk feeding equipment must be washed daily and anyone visiting the calf shed should have clean boots that have been dipped in disinfectant.

Calories: Calves require half of their daily feed to maintain condition – keep them warm and functioning – and the other half for daily growth. In colder weather calves require more energy (milk) for maintenance.

TOP TIP

Measure milk replacer accurately by using a scales and graduated measuring jug. For farmers using automatic calf feeders, ensure the feeder is fully cleaned out before use and calibrated correctly.



Farewell Wishes

We are very sorry to announce that Dr. David Lawrence, our Ruminant Support Specialist, is leaving us for pastures new. David has been a very valued member of our team since 2014 and familiar to customers in Kilkenny, Carlow, Laois and Tipperary where he delivered excellent technical support at farm level.

We know that David will be sorely missed by us and our customers and we wish David all the best in his future career within the Agri Industry.

Spring Calf Feed Special Offer

Bulk: For deliveries over 3 tonnes there will a discount on the order of €50 per order.

Bags: For a minimum order of one full pallet (56 Bags) avail of 2 free bags of Ultra Calf Cubes.



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