Brett Brothers Limited

Newsletter

November 2026



Dry Cow Management

As we approach November it is time to start planning for the next lactation for Spring Calving Herds. There is the temptation to 'milk cows on' but it is important to dry off according to calving dates. The aim during the dry period is to manage the cow to produce a healthy calf, prevent milk fever and associated metabolic disorders around the time of calving and to set the cow up for her next lactation and reproductive cycle.

How long should the dry period be?

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The optimum dry cow period is eight weeks however this can vary between herds and within herds.

Some of the factors that influence the length of the dry period:

- Body condition of cows in late lactation should be monitored. Thin and lame cows need a longer dry period to gain bodyweight and ideally should be grouped separately with a tailored nutritional plan.
- Lactation number should be a point of focus as cows entering their second lactation often fall behind the main herd and it is important that they are given time to gain condition.
- Cows scanned for multiple births should always be dried off for at least 10 -12 weeks.
- Forage quality and quantity available determines the energy intake and may influence the length of the dry period. Silage being fed to dry cows should be tested for quality and mineral content.

Managing Body Condition is Key
The most important aspect of dry cow nutrition is to ensure cows are at the correct body condition score (BCS) at calving.

A single unit of body condition (1 BCS) is equivalent to approximately 50 kgs liveweight. Check BCS of the herd now as this is the best opportunity to address issues and have cows in the ideal condition before calving season commences. The target is 90% of the herd within the optimal range.

- Target BCS at drying off is between 2.75 and 3.0. Group cows according to condition score if there are a lot of cows outside the optimal range.

- Target BCS at calving is between 3.0 and 3.25 with a slightly higher target of up to 3.50 for in-calf heifers entering the herd.

An important point to note is that if a cow needs to gain 0.5 BCS that is a required gain of 25 kgs liveweight! Over 50 days that is a required gain of 0.5 kgs/cow/day and a nutritional plan needs to be put in place to support this.

Feeding Tips and Supplementation

Cull Cows
Cull Cows are always topical when there may be a silage shortage in a yard. Milk solid production may be good and it is tempting to 'milk on culls' but it is futile milking cull cows to fatten them if you are short of silage! It may be more prudent to consider selling the culls and keeping valuable silage for the main herd. Do the sums and look at the financials of having to replace silage that cull cows will consume.

Farm Minerals
All housed stock will require minerals to supplement silage, especially young growing stock often forgotten. Bretts dairy, beef, weanling and calf feeds are fortified with sufficient minerals if fed at the correct feed rate. When straights, fodder beet, maize silage or wholecrop is fed additional minerals may be required and it is important to seek nutritional advice about the appropriate mineral suitable.

Bretts Bovine Proform Pack is a customised farm mineral suitable for cattle and lactating dairy cows. This high phosphorus mineral also contains Biotin for improved hoof health. The inclusion of Acid Buf and Actisaf Yeast helps rumen function and makes this mineral an ideal choice for intensive diets and high cereal/fodder beet diets.

Bretts PIP Dry Cow Minerals are renowned for consistent performance. They are specifically formulated to meet the requirements of the dry cow, taking into consideration that silages are generally low in copper, selenium and iodine. The PIP Dry Cow mineral is fortified with high levels of Vitamin E which boosts immunity and Vitamin D3 which helps calcium regulation and the prevention of milk fever at calving. The incidence of problems such as retained afterbirth, milk fever, stillborn calves can be reduced greatly if cows receive appropriate dry cow nutrition.

Tips for success:

- Ensure all cows get the correct amount daily – weigh minerals accurately
- Feed in a diet feeder or sprinkle on silage - if feeding space is limited we suggest feeding minerals twice per day
- Order minerals for delivery in November and have them in the yard to start feeding early calvers on time! We advise a minimum period of 6 weeks for all cows.

Key Attributes in Bretts PIP Dry Cow Mineral

Vitamin E: Placental Vitamin E is crucial for calf health and is influenced by a cow's intake of Vitamin E in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy. During the dry period, each cow requires around 30,000 IU of Vitamin E — equal to at least 700 IU per day over six weeks. Adequate Vitamin E is vital for developing healthy calf embryos, supporting strong heart, lung, and muscle formation. Ensuring correct Vitamin E levels in dry cow diets helps reduce the risk of stillbirths and heart failure at birth.

Vitamin D3: Vitamin D3 regulates calcium absorption and mobilisation, helping ensure easier calving, faster recovery, and fewer cases of milk fever or displaced abomasum. While cows can store Vitamin D for about three months, winter forages are low in D3, so supplementation is needed.

Selenium: Selenium, like Vitamin E, acts as an antioxidant and supports cow and calf immunity. Cows fed protected selenium produce calves with strong heart, lung, and muscle development, reducing the risk of stillbirths and weak calves. Organic selenium yeast also helps prepare the mammary gland for the next lactation and lowers the risk of mastitis.

Phosphorus: Dry cows need about 30 g of phosphorus per day from forage and minerals. As phosphorus levels in grass and silage are variable and in recent years are falling, it's vital to use a high-phosphorus mineral (over 3%). Adequate phosphorus helps prevent milk fever and slow calving.

Biotin & Protected Zinc: Biotin supports liver function during the dry period, helping prepare cows for the next lactation and reducing the risk of ketosis, especially in well-conditioned cows. When combined with protected zinc, it strengthens the hoof structure, improving hardness and reducing lameness in the next lactation.

Seaweed Minerals: Seaweed minerals increase the bioavailability of trace minerals, particularly iodine. When combined with protected copper, they help boost calf health and overall mineral balance in the cow.

Special Offer

Order Bretts PIP Dry Cow minerals now and get 2 bags free with every 1 ton order. Contact the office or your Technical Sales Rep for further information on the specifications and prices.

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