



Pasture Quality Trend (November 2019)

The weather has been variable with southerly activity bringing large hail events swinging to days where the very warm NW winds bring daytime temperatures up close to 30 degrees. Pasture production has held on reasonably well despite the heat we have received as the soil temperatures have not climbed excessively yet.

Heading forward a major focus needs to be maintaining pasture quality as best you can. Hitting pasture residuals is key, so any clumpy or thatchy residuals that will be over 1600 kgDM/ha and won't produce quality next round need to be topped behind the cows. The ideal situation is where cows hit target residual but are not hungry before they come to milking. Mowing behind the cows is preferable now to mowing in front as it will not limit the selective ability by the cows to get a better diet and will not mean that pasture will respire after it is cut, lowering the sugar and ME of the pasture before it is consumed.

Dry Matter (DM) (%)

DM dropped through November as the lush spring pasture got growing, we can expect this to increase again with the seed head phase coming through.

Crude Protein (CP) (%)

Protein levels have increased as the soil is starting to cycle more N and plant uptake is high through its rapid vegetative growth stages. Protein will have been unlikely to be limiting milk production this month, however as pasture is going reproductive, we can expect that some of the available protein will be locked up in the increasing structural fibre and lignin content of pasture. This may limit production through this seed head phase and if per cow production is high then it would be worthwhile considering using a protein supplement to maintain production through this 4-6 week period so you can make the most of the quality that comes back into the pasture later in the season.

Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) (%)

We have had an excellent season with NDF so far, levels have been low and intake on a per cos basis has been high. We are starting to see it creep up since show weekend as the seed head has started to come through. Because of the high NDF, cows will fill up, and look content with less kg pasture consumed. Don't fall into the trap thinking they have enough energy, despite looking satisfied. Less kg pasture intake, of lower ME equals less energy in. A high-quality protein supplementation like peas or soya with now NDF is a good addition to the diet at this time of year as it helps dilute the high NDF, increasing total energy intake as well as the additional rumen degradable protein it brings.

Metabolisable Energy (MJME/kg DM)

ME is still good, however as NDF increases and degradability of the plant reduces ME will start to drop. As most herds are mid-way through mating, don't be tempted to drop the concentrate that has been holding the energy intake of the cows up, especially as the ME intake of pasture is dropping both due to NDF increasing and ME dropping. A declining plane of nutrition through the 2nd 6 weeks of mating is the opposite of what the cows need to cycle and implant pregnancies.