



## Pasture Quality Trend (April 2017)

The wet spell we have recently had resulted in low dry matters in some pastures, lameness issues surfacing due to soft hooves, and some pugging problems. As a result, we have seen herds go to 16-hour, or OAD milking. If the cows are producing well, this may have a large impact on income for the remainder of the season. It is worth considering other options if you are forced into a change.

### Dry Matter (DM) (%)

Dry Matter has dropped again from the typically higher summer pasture to warning levels of around 16%. Some farms have tested as low as 11% DM with new grass. An interesting way to look at this is the milk some cows with a higher fat and protein tests are producing will actually be drier than the pasture the cows are eating. These very low dry matter tests usually turn around, and get back up to 16-18% relatively quickly as the rain/drizzle stops and everything gets a chance to dry out.

### Crude Protein (CP) (%)

Crude Protein is still increasing, and reflecting this is the milk urea levels in milk. As CP% exceeds the requirement of the cow, then extra energy is required to excrete it as urea. Pasture allocation, and production per cow will be the deciding factor whether cows are in extreme excess. A combination of silage, fodder beet, reasonable production, and less pasture allocated to push the round out are all factors that will reduce the protein load on the cows. It is important to note that with fodder beet in the diet, the ration can quickly become very wet, may induce a protein deficiency. Despite what the manure looks like it is telling you.

### Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) (%)

NDF levels have finally started to drop to what we would expect for this time of year. The age, and management of pasture seems to be the deciding factors in the level of NDF tested. The current ration will dictate what this lower NDF will mean for your herd. With the wet weather we have had, before the NDF dropped, the energy demands of the cow increased, and she was not able to consume more pasture (energy) to counter this. As a result, we have had reports of herds dropping up to 0.3 of a BCS as cows mobilised reserves to keep warm, production has also taken a hit. If you have not accounted for the wet weather, and lost body condition, then it is imperative to build this back heading into winter.

Now, as NDF% has dropped back to lower levels and with fodder beet in some late lactation diets, cows may be short of effective fibre. The best way to rectify this is to ensure that cereal straw is available when the cows are on beet, and on the lane if needed.

### Metabolisable Energy (MJME/kg DM)

Pasture coming out of the reproductive phase, and lignin levels continuing to drop, the degradability of pasture is improving. This is shown through the ME, which has been creeping up even since the low levels we had through summer. The level ME will reach from now on will be determined by the plants ability to capture sunlight, and turn that into carbohydrate. The potential for this reduces as day length shortens, with poor weather, the photosynthetic potential is further reduced.

As round lengths are pushed out to continue milking into May, the impact that pasture has on the cow reduces. Feeding fodder beet can be very profitable, but careful consideration needs to be taken to avoid common pit-falls that will cost the business next season. Contact MilkMAP consulting to get specific advice for your situation, and what you can do to maximise profitability next season.