



Pasture Quality Trend (Nov – Dec 2017)

What a transition, we have gone from waterlogged soils to moisture and heat stress within 4-6 weeks. Both air and soil temperatures have been climbing steadily with little fluctuation since November, and the last bit of rain was back in October, with 9 mm on the 26/Oct. Irrigators in many places can't keep up, and there is a lot of seed head being pushed up with the water and heat stress. Any areas without irrigation are bone dry, and pasture production has all but stopped in these areas.

Dry Matter (DM) (%)

DM% is climbing as expected with the current weather and reproductive stage of pasture. A higher DM% will mean, in most cases, the pasture walk is underestimating the DM available in the paddock, so the cows have a little more than expected in each paddock. Use your residuals as an indicator of how full the cows are, a fully fed cow will be reluctant to graze below 1600 kgDM. Leaving these residuals will also maximise growth rates as the plant does not have to use resources to get some green, solar panels, up after grazing. Keep an eye on any paddocks with thatch at the bottom, this will give you a false sense of security as to how much good quality feed is left for the cows.

Crude Protein (CP) (%)

CP% has started dropping as the pasture is in full reproductive mode. In many cases, where milk production is reasonable, or quality has got away, protein will be limiting production. In some pastures CP% is still testing reasonably well, but when the cows are examined, they are short of rumen degradable protein. RDP is being locked up with lignin, which is high as the pasture is reproductive. If you are supplementing protein, be careful of what feeds you try to do this with. The fractions of protein in many protein supplements are not the ones you need to balance the lack of RDP in the pasture. A poorly balanced diet is a good recipe for early embryonic death, especially if you have high milk ureas.

Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) (%)

NDF levels are on the increase. Aggressive reproductive behaviour from pasture is resulting in NDF, ADF and lignin levels increasing. This will be the case until we get some decent rain, or temperatures settle down and pasture gets back into vegetative growth. 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. At this stage of the season, cows will drop in milk to hold condition as total energy intake falls, this will not have good results for reproduction, a falling plain of nutrition is the opposite of what we want.

Metabolisable Energy (MJME/kg DM)

ME is looking dangerous in some places. The increase in lignin results in lower degradability, and less energy being released from the same kg of grass, when compared with spring pasture. Even some of the greenest, less stressed pasture is testing well below 12 MJME.

As pasture supply decreases some farms may find their graziers, or run off blocks run out of pasture and the young stock must come back onto the platform. If this is the case on your property, do not neglect your young stock and ensure they are well fed, especially your calves. They will not grow well on low protein, high fibre pasture, and you will be left with very poor replacements in 2 years. Some active planning and feed budgeting should be done to determine your position now, and through until the end of the season. Know your trigger points of when to buy feed and to sell stock.

Give us a bell if you want to discuss anything in this report and how it relates to your farm, or if you want to explore what services MilkMap have to add to your farms performance or profitability.