

Grazing and fertilizer targets

Spring calving will be well under way on many of the farms in the Lakelands region at this stage of the year as we see a small stretch in the evenings. The heavy rainfall over the past number of weeks has resulted in a delay in nitrogen application on a lot of grazing ground on many farms.

As weather and soil temperatures begin to pick up, many farmers will look to apply nitrogen. First fertiliser spreading is late this year. Remember that nitrogen application is for future stocking rate and grass growth over the next 3-4 weeks ahead. Farmers will have more cows calved on farm in late March and they will have a bigger appetite and herd demand. The recommendation is that most dairy farms should apply two rounds of fertiliser N before the end of March – totalling about 70 kg N/ha (60 units/ac) for well stocked farms. This could typically be 2 bags of CAN or have half a bag of urea applied twice. This can be reduced accordingly for lower stocked farms. If you have no N spread to date – spread half this as soon as weather conditions permit, and apply the remainder in late March. Farmers with low P index soils may get a better response from a compound fertilizer on the 2nd application when phosphorus is applied.

First rotation grazing

The basic principle of first round of grazing should allow sufficient time for grass to regrow for the start of the second rotation. A late start to grazing can result in (a) shortage of grass in the second rotation or (b) late finish to the first round, resulting in cows grazing heavy covers of poor quality grass.

The target is to have one third of the farm grazed by early March. This was difficult to achieve due to heavy rainfall, but farms with good roadways and access point have fared best so far. Some farms have a carryover of heavy covers from last winter as the mild weather continued well in to December and grass covers may up to over 1800kg/ha on individual paddocks. In this case it is better to start grazing some lighter grass at first until cows settle into grazing.

The main points to note in spring are to ensure paddocks are “cleaned” out well, i.e. down to 4 cm and reduce silage allocation to cows were grass is plentiful. Remember the idea of the spring rotation planner is to set up your farm for the grass growing year ahead.

A simple fence reel and a dozen pig tail posts is an easy and effective method many farmers use in to order to allocate an certain area to the cows and get them to graze down to 4 cm similar to images below. Give it a go this spring!!



Graze out well avoiding excess damage



Protect sections already grazed using strip wire

Herd fertility: Key driver of farm profit

The overall success of your 6 week in calf rate starts today; every cow should be monitored post calving and try to maintain these cows / heifers at a BCS of 3.

Lakeland average stats

- Calving interval - 409 days
- Days to calve 50% herd - 46 days
- 343 kg solids per cow

For many of you producers planning to mate maiden heifers this May, plan how many you need to breed and get them weighed to determine if they are on target or not. Any heifer > 290 kg today should be fit for mating come May if performance is maintained.

Many farmers do not realise the cost that poor fertility has on overall farm profit. Complete the box below for your own herd and this will help you determine how your own herd is performing in relation to the top 10 – 12% of producers

The top 10 % will have 85% of the herd calved by the 3rd week of March, or alternatively 15% left to calve. Typical 50 cow herd = 7 cows left to calve when you read this:

How are you performing??

Performance Measure	Your herd	Top 10%
% calved in first 3 weeks		50%
% cows left to calf > 25 th March		< 10%
% heifers calved in first month		100%
% assisted calving		<5%
% problem cows (retained placenta, milk fever etc.)		<5%
Number of AI bred replacement heifers		28 per 100 cows
Calving Interval		< 370 days
% of heifers 24 months age at first calving		98%

The Joint programme team has identified herd fertility as an area which requires work, given the overall Lakeland calving interval of 409 days.

If your own herd is falling behind in relation to the targets set above we strongly invite you to attend the fertility walks. Remember good herd fertility and overall farm profit is strongly linked.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter the Joint Programme team will be hosting a series of on farm fertility walks during April and early May. The focus will be on improving fertility performance. Suppliers will be notified via txt when dates and venues have been finalised.

For further information & advice contact any of the joint programme advisors

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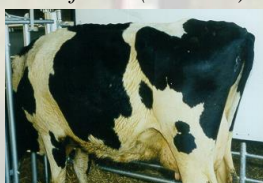
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Management points for the month

1 Ensure the energy demand of the cow is met post calving with high energy good quality feed

2 Assess cow condition. Put thin cows on once daily milking for 6 wks. pre breeding to improve fertility

BCS of 2.25 (too thin)



BCS of 3.0 (ideal)

