



The Secrets when the grass is coming:

As the days start to get longer, hopefully the mud is drying up and the grass is growing. During spring, high growth rates of pasture quickly becomes the cheapest form of feed available and the largest component of the dairy ration. The key is to maximise this pasture but more importantly provide the correct balance from other feeds to convert this pasture into milk. It is very easy to see the increasing pasture covers and cut back on other feeds.

From a cash flow point of view this makes perfect sense, however in terms of giving the cow everything she needs to produce milk, pasture often does not tick all the boxes. With good milk prices at present, ensuring your cows are maximising their potential in production, while maintaining optimum health is the best option. The return on investment is much higher than in lower pay out seasons.

Traditional spring pasture is very high in crude protein, has moderate energy levels and has low fibre content. This can result in excess protein in the diet which the animal is then forced to excrete. This uses up valuable energy that should be used in producing milk. Low fibre levels speeds up the rate of passage through the cow, the rumen bugs do not have enough time to utilize everything available in the grass.

After wet periods like we have seen, the pasture growth takes off, it is easy to misinterpret how much you are feeding. The harsh reality is the very low DM% of spring pasture often means farms underfeed their cows. Grass that is 15kgDM in March is much different to 15kgDM in September. Ideally weekly testing of pasture DM% is money well spent, at least you know what you are offering the cows.

There is a saying I often hear which to me can easily sum up spring pasture: "COWS ARE FULLY FED BUT NUTRITIONALLY STARVING".

Supplementary feeding in spring or high pasture diets may seem unnecessary, however it is the optimal time to be reviewing the diet to ensure the cows have the ability to convert the pasture into milk.

In high protein rations when feeding high levels of lush pasture, the inclusion of a carbohydrate in the ration will help increase pasture utilization and will also drive production peaks.

The ideal diet is moderate NDF (Fibre) with a range of different energy sources will provide a long slow release of energy as the cows are digesting pasture. Using barley or wheat is a great help, however these grains will be broken down in a similar timeframe when exposed to the rumen.



With that in mind, James & Son has available a large range of energy products. The blends we offer provide sustained energy over a longer period of time. The focus is to complement pasture with the end goal being better utilisation of pasture which means more milk and better animal health.

Another important factor to consider, is mating. In a ration with excess protein, in particular Rumen degradable protein (RDP) which is very high in pasture rations, the cow uses energy to excrete this protein. The result is, we often see cows in energy deficit and this can have a major impact on the ability of cows to cycle or hold conception. Adding energy to a ration at this time of year not only helps increase production and pasture utilisation, it gives your cows the best opportunity to get back in calf setting you up for next year.

All of the J&S team have a great understanding of how to utilise energy at this time of year and are more than happy to offer advice and options to ensure you can maximise your cheapest form of feed into more milk.

All the best for the 2017/18 milking season.

Greg Pillar
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