

2.0 Strategies to manage low pasture cover at calving

Plan

- Face your situation – walk the farm, confirm the size of any deficit and develop a plan on how to fill the deficit
- Share your plan, seek advice
- Monitor actual pasture cover weekly and adjust plan.

Options

- Apply nitrogen to boost growth providing the soil temperature is greater than 7°C and the soil isn't saturated. If low soil temperatures/high leaching apply sulphate
- The slower the rotation the quicker average pasture cover will be back on target - do not speed up the area grazed (rotation)
- Protect future pasture growth – minimise pugging
- Stand off, use an appropriate stand-off area to avoid pugging and over grazing (less than 1100kg DM/ha), see DairyNZ's 'Minimising Muck, Maximising Money' for guidelines: www.dairynz.co.nz
- Use supplements to build pasture cover, not just for milk in the vat
- Cost out whether there are supplements available that are profitable to feed at the payout predicted for the season
- Sort a system to feed supplements that minimises waste and is practical ASAP
- Balance cow condition with feed at calving. Aim to get cows to BCS 4.5. Greatest return from lifting the lightest cows
- Aim to get average pasture cover at calving to minimum of 2100 kg DM/ha
- A month after calving, the priority is feed for milking cows. Restrict the dries, especially the late calving cows up to 50% of their target energy requirements (no less than 5 kg DM/dry cow)
- If you do not have the feed (pasture or supplement) restrict cows at the start of calving to minimise the size of the deficit
- Prioritise feeding: colostrum and milkers first, then dry cows
- Aim to offer colostrum and milking cows at least 12 kg DM Friesian; 10 kg DM Jersey
- Monitor residuals to ensure intakes are being achieved. Colostrum cows aim for 1500 kg DM/ha, milkers target no less than 1400kg DM/ha, dry cows 900 kg DM/ha (no pugging damage)
- Where the farm does not have the resources to feed to these levels, the milkers can graze lower
- Milkers must be offered a minimum of 10 kg DM/cow Friesians and 8 kg DM/cow Jerseys. These feeding levels will reduce subsequent milk production. The extent of the carry-over effect on milk production from underfeeding depends on the length of time cows are restricted. The longer the period of underfeeding, the greater the loss
- Feed must be purchased or stocking rate reduced if the above intakes cannot be met
- Avoid creating too many mobs
- Ensure magnesium and other mineral supplementation is adequate, particularly for colostrum cows
- Once A Day (OAD) milking is an option to save time and improve cows energy status in the spring but it comes at a cost as it reduces the potential milk production for the season.

A tough winter/spring means having to make some compromises. Break the problem down into manageable bits.