 Reduced mating performance occurs if cows are underfed at mating time. If feed is short on your farm this spring you need to:

- Carefully plan your mating programme (see FarmFact 2-5)
- Make farm management decision to deal with the feed shortage

Strategies for dealing with a feed shortage at mating time:

1. Farm management

- Be prepared to split the milking herds to reduce stress and competition on younger and thinner cows
- Start recording pre-mating heats early. This will allow decisions to be made regarding feeding levels of non-cycling cows and the use of CIDR’s to help overcome anoestrus
- Preferentially feed younger, thinner animals to get them cycling
- Put non-cycling cows on once a day milking. This may increase their chance of cycling
- Maximise pasture growth by:
  - Reducing pugging damage - remove cows off the paddocks in wet weather, use the race or farm dairy yard as a stand off area
  - Avoiding overgrazing - if feed is short remove the cows from the paddock after 4-5 hours of grazing. If you are break feeding the cows, back fence to protect pasture re-growth
- Do not speed up the rotation too soon in early spring. Supplements can be used to keep the rotation length at 25 days or more until grass growth is greater than the herds feed demand. This occurs in late September in most dairying areas in most seasons. Very quick rotation lengths in early spring reduce grass growth in late spring
- Treat non-cyclers with CIDR devices

In some cases delaying the start of mating may help next season’s calving concentrated and help the mating programme next year. Other options should be considered first. Speak with your DairyNZ Consulting Officer.

2. Decrease the amount of feed required

- Review the stocking rate
  - Sell non dairy animals
  - Graze off young stock and late calvers
  - Cull early on calving date and/or low PW
- Controlled underfeeding. Reduce the cows intake slightly in early lactation to ensure there is feed for mating. High BW cows will “bounce back” from a short period of underfeeding
3. Increase the amount of feed available

- Apply Nitrogen fertiliser. This must be applied 3 to 4 weeks before the feed is required. In most cases Nitrogen is the most cost effective way to increase the amount of feed available.
- Buy supplements (eg. hay, meal). Compare the price of supplements on an energy basis to find the cheapest alternative (see Table below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cost in cents per unit of energy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nitrogen boosted grass</td>
<td>1.1 to 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal</td>
<td>$440-$520/tonne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molasses</td>
<td>$140/200 litres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased hay</td>
<td>$5/bale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$7/bale</td>
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