HARPERS FEEDS
Focused on nutrition

feedtalk

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THE BEST WAY TO FINISH YOUR LAMBS

The big decision for early lambing flocks is whether to creep feed this season's lambs.

There are many benefits from creep feeding but it will come at increased costs. Creep feeding has to be seen as an investment in your lamb crop, allowing you to maximise returns and benefit the farm as a whole.

There are five main reasons why creep feeding can have huge benefits to your flock and your lamb sales:

1. Creep feeding can ensure that growth rates are maximised at the age when feed conversion is at its best, meaning you get the most cost-effective growth.
2. Lambs sold deadweight will achieve a higher killing out percentage if they have been creep fed.
3. It allows lambs to be sold when the deadweight price is seasonally at its highest.
4. Creep fed lambs can be sold sooner, meaning they beat the mid-late summer price drop.
5. Dry ewes can be kept tighter, potentially reducing fertiliser costs and freeing up land for extra silage or grazing of other livestock.

The feed conversion ratio (FCR) is significantly higher in pre-weaned lambs. These lambs typically have an FCR of 1:1, meaning for every 1kgs of creep eaten, the lamb will gain 1kg.

Post weaning, FCR will increase to a maximum of 6:1 (6kg creep eaten will gain 1kg of liveweight gain) as the lambs mature.

Average daily liveweight gain for twin lambs when suckling from the ewe in lowland flocks is generally around 200-250g/day but on creep it will increase to nearer 350-400g/day

Faster growing lambs

For a single lamb the increase is from 250-300g/day to 400-500g/day. This higher growth means single lambs can reach target slaughter liveweight of 40kgs plus within 10-12 weeks old. For creep fed doubles the target age at slaughter will be12-16 weeks old. These lambs will also have a higher killing out percentage ranging from 50-55%. Creep fed lambs are also likely to grade better resulting in more lambs hitting confirmation of E and U Grade and receiving higher price per kilo and maximising returns.

Targeting lambs for the earlier market can have benefits to the farm as a large percentage of the lamb crop can be off the farm within 3-5 months. This will free up grazing for other stock to graze or for silage making.

With the majority of lambs being sold off the ewes, ewes can then be kept on a smaller acreage, which means they are not grazing grass that you might have allocated for other uses. Fewer lambs around over the summer and autumn will also mean you can aim to close grass up for flushing ewes to help increase the following year lamb crop.

Our popular Harpers Lamb Start 2 Finish Pellets and Rapid Lamb Pellets are very palatable to encourage early intakes and have a good balance of protein and energy sources to encourage lambs to grow a skeletal frame while at the same time laying down flesh.

To encourage lambs to use creep feeders, site feeders in sheltered areas where there is hard standing, if possible. Ideally move them regularly to avoid areas getting muddy, but this can be difficult in practice because they are heavy when full.

Coccidiosis risk

Creep feeding can increase the risk of coccidiosis because you are bringing lambs together in a concentrated area. If you haven't fed creep before this is something to keep an eye on. The risk of coccidiosis can be minimised with good management. For example, make sure lambs are run in tight age groups and avoid repeated, sequential use of turn out fields.

Take the time to plan how you will creep feed lambs this spring to maximise the value and returns from your lamb crop this year.

For more information, please speak to your Harpers Feeds Specialist.

Matt Dymond
Ruminant Feed Specialist
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GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS

Downward pressure continues on cereals with a better outlook on global production, and continued exports from the Black Sea easing global prices.

Russian exports remain higher than normal as they have a large surplus and are currently the cheapest exporter. Australia have just harvested a record crop and India is also predicting a bumper crop. We have got to be aware, however, that global demand is still greater than production, so any problems could cause price spikes.

Even though we have seen an easing in cereal prices, many other product prices remain stagnant, with proteins trading higher than the start of the winter.

With delays from Argentina, soya supplies remain tight nearby and as we go into a discount for the summer, shippers are reluctant to bring unsold material into ports. Prices into the mill are over £550/T on the spot. Looking forward all eyes are on Brazil and Argentina, as Brazil is set to produce a 'whopper' harvest, but the Argentinian crop keeps being downgraded with some predictions at sub 40 million tonnes. And we must remember that most of our soya comes from Argentina.

Rape remains expensive, and material is in short supply with a lack of crushing taking place and high demand. The major UK crushing plants aren't sellers until May and shippers are buying back material which is never a good sign! A German minister is proposing not to use crops in Biofuel, and this would be a real concern for rape meal if this were to happen. Distillers are currently in the same situation as rape.

Andrew Davies
Operations Director
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Fibres are also difficult. Sugar beet is seeing a lack of British supply and imports remain expensive, more expensive than the winter. Again, shippers are very reluctant to bring unsold material into ports. Soya hulls will remain expensive and in short supply until new crop in May.

To summarise, cereals should remain under pressure, but growers are reluctant sellers of new crop barley at around £200/T ex-farm. Mid proteins should come under pressure in the next few months as demand eases on the back of cereals. Proteins are difficult to call on the forwards, with a lot depending on the harvest in South America. One major concern is the potential threat from China as they come out of lockdown which will increase demand.

To discuss any of these points further, please call the office on 01409 254 300.

Farming thoughts

It was a pleasure to see nearly 400 customers attend our recent sheep meetings where we could update everyone on the latest pricing, raw material availability and GS4 mixtures and their alternatives.

The recent government announcement on an increase in capital grant payments back-dated to 1st January will be a great help for those of you in stewardship schemes.

As we all end another financial year, it's always good to stop and evaluate what we've done and what the plan is going forward.

The dairy sector is seeing milk prices dropping back to last spring's levels. Focus will have to be on milk from forage and maintaining milk quality to hit processors' contracts.

Since the new year, fertiliser, electricity, fuel, gas and feed raw material prices have all fallen as international economies find their feet. With lower numbers of pigs and chickens, the red meat sector should improve. Beef , currently at £4.70, are heading in the right direction, we just need lamb to follow.

Going into the spring and summer, we wouldn't advise anyone to fix prices now except wheat and barley. We will be revising our price lists each month over quarter one and two.

This month we are running a series of Planet Dairy roadshows across the region so those of you in milk, come along and hear about how Harpers can help you reduce your carbon footprint. We look forward to welcoming you to one of these Planet roadshows.

Glen Johns
Sales Director
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GENETICS KEY TO REARING BEEF CROSS DAIRY CALVES

Currently there is a great opportunity to make a good margin finishing dairy beef cross calves, with a 350kg carcase finished animal returning around £1600.

You will need good facilities and management and will need to be able to make good quality forage and achieve growth rates of 1kg/day, allowing calves to finish at 18 months old. Most importantly you need to source calves with the genetic merit to allow them to grow quickly and efficiently.

There is no point in having a calf that will not grow. Calves have to be bred right and this means paying attention to both the cow and the sire used. Avoid buying calves from cows with more than 30% Jersey genetics, but don't be afraid of buying crosses from Norwegian Red, Montbeliarde or New Zealand Friesian.

It will pay to know the genetics of the calves you are buying so try to develop a relationship with a dairy farmer when sourcing calves as this can have benefits in terms of both genetics and calf health but remember you will have different objectives.

Try to specify beef bulls that will give you the cross you want, look to use a bull that is in the top 10% of the breed for traits including growth rate and calving ease.

More recently there is information coming through that will let you choose bulls that are more efficient at converting feed into meat, allowing animals to grow more quickly from reduced inputs. Higher feed conversion can be the difference between profit and loss.

Remember that the dairy farmer will want their cows to calve down easily and settle into lactation quickly. So they will want to know about calving ease and gestation length. By careful sire selection, it is possible to get a balance between a calf that will be born easily but will also grow well.

There is a new way of setting a price for calves direct from a dairy farm. If you pay the deadweight price, say £4.50/ kg for the liveweight of the calf averaging, say 40kgs at 10 days of age, equalling £180 per calf, you have paid a fair price. If the deadweight price drops then the calves are less.

Please call your Feed Specialist for further advice and help.

Bill Harper
Director
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NATIONAL SUCCESS FOR DEVON FARMING FAMILY

To celebrate its 50th anniversary, the Limousin Society ran a commercial herd competition for the first time and the winners were the Mather family from Besshill Farm near Barnstaple.

Edward and Hazel Mather run the farm with Edward's father Jim. And their daughters Selina, Ruby and Emily are getting increasingly involved with the stock. The all-grass farm is home to a 104 cow herd of polled Limousin with all progeny finished on farm, with many of them sold through their farm shop.

The shop was set up 20 years ago as a way to add value to cattle during the Foot and Mouth outbreak and has remained a major part of the business, developing a fully justified excellent reputation. The rearing system is geared to providing the required flow of finished cattle for the shop with the balance, mainly steers, sold to ABP.

Around 85 cows will calve in the spring with the balance in the autumn. Bulls are turned in for 8-9 weeks to ensure a tight block and usually 15 home reared heifers will calve down each year.

Spring born calves will spend the summer on their mothers and are fed a Harpers beef blend from around August, being weaned in November when they are consuming 4-5kg/day. They are housed on big bale grass silage and blend. Steers will receive 5kg/day of blend while heifers are fed 3kg.

The Mather family

Any steers weighing 550kg are kept indoors in the spring, finishing on barley while lighter animals will finish at grass. Any heifers not retained for breeding will be sold through the shop with a target 360-370kg deadweight. Spring born steers are sold to ABP, targeting 680kg liveweight (390-400kg deadweight).

Autumn born calves receive the same blend from six weeks old and stay on the dam until early August. They will stay out at grass as long as possible before being housed on big bale silage and barley until finishing. All are sold through the shop.

The Mathers calve all cows themselves and ensure each calve receives 500ml of colostrum from their dam via a tube immediately after calving.

Although it increases workloads, they believe this helps gets calves on their feet and suckling and ensure a good supply of strong calves.

Achieving net zero is a major focus for the family who are conscious that they are supplying the end consumer who is interested in the provenance of the meat. Ten years ago they installed solar panels and the latest development is a water wheel which is hoped will supply the electricity needs of the house and farm. They have planted 3000 trees and re-established hedgerows.

In a move to reduce their carbon footprint further, they are currently trialling Harpers Planet beef diets which contain zero soya and palm kernel and hope that they can remove soya without affecting performance.

The award is a fantastic recognition of a farming family determined to deliver high-quality and sustainable beef, through great attention to detail and an efficient system.

Jake Chisholm
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PREPARING FOR SPRING CALVING

Alex Cornish
Ruminant Feed Specialist
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Getting dry period feeding right will be crucial to achieve a successful start to lactation in spring calved herds.

The dry period is significant to the success of the next lactation so make sure that the dry cow diet is farm specific taking account of the forages available, and hitting the key targets for:

- ✔ Megajoules of energy per day
- ✔ Levels of protein
- ✔ Mineral balance
- ✔ Intakes
- ✔ Feed, water space and allocation

Our lab data is showing that several late cut silages have analysed with very high protein levels and somewhat lower energy content.

When formulating the overall dry cow diets on farm the usual target is 13-14% crude protein, so farms utilising later cut forages may have to include them carefully, monitoring the overall protein content. However, when rationing with low protein forages like straw and/or hay be cautious as diets any lower than 12% crude protein can result in reduced colostrum quality and lower feed intakes resulting in early lactation milk yield losses. This is why it is essential to hit the protein requirements for the dry cow group to enable a smooth and effective transition.

Feeding higher quantities of different forages could potentially produce a mineral imbalance compared to normal. Grass silage is often high in potassium, and an oversupply of potassium in dry cow diets can lead to issues such as increased foetal membrane retention and milk fever due to a restriction in calcium mobilisation. Calcium should be fed at very low levels and only to then prepare the cow for calcium mobilisation at calving.

Mixing straw into the ration significantly reduces the overall base energy level of the diet, while also increasing overall diet dry matter which might depress intakes. Ensure that cows are eating the correct allocation otherwise this could potentially mean a loss in body condition due to reduced intakes.

When rationing dry cow diets, we need to be hitting 110 – 140 MJ of ME per cow per day dependant on liveweight. Oversupplying energy pre-calving can cause an increase in body condition and result in negative feed intakes post calving, resulting in poor rise to peak yield and associated health problems.

To discuss your dry cow diets, speak to your Feed Specialist.

PLAN AHEAD FOR QUALITY FORAGE

Silage making may seem a long way off at the moment but starting to plan it now can help to ensure you make the best forage possible this season. Sufficient stocks of good quality forage is the base of any ruminant diet and getting silage made well will help save money on purchased feeds.

In order to make good silage, it is vital to plan fertiliser and slurry applications in relation to your planned cutting dates. Grass can only absorb nitrogen at a set rate. Spreading slurry or applying fertiliser too late can mean there is insufficient time for the nitrogen to be used by the growing crop of grass. The result will be high nitrate levels in the grass at mowing which will result in poor fermentation. Precut testing grass will let you check nitrate levels and improve timing of cutting.

Using a silage inoculant is a vital part of making the best silage possible. Trials have consistently shown reduced clamp dry matter losses, improved feed intake, and higher weight gain and milk production.

Aerobic stability is also greatly improved meaning less wastage on the face when clamps are opened.

An effective silage additive helps drive fermentation and more rapid and beneficial fermentation, preventing undesirable microbes from robbing valuable protein and energy resources from the ensiled forage. They ensure a faster reduction in pH, reduced nutrient breakdown and reduced dry matter losses.

Ensiling involves lactic acid bacteria fermenting sugars into lactic acid, which decreases the pH and prevents the growth of undesirable bacteria, moulds, and yeasts.

The Magniva range of grass inoculants has been specifically formulated for a range of challenges, such as bad weather and variable dry matters in the cut grass. They contain a blend of specific patented bacteria and enzymes that have been proven to enhance silage quality, palatability and reduce total dry matter losses of valuable crops.

Using sound science and proven results Magniva inoculants apply the right bacterial strains for the right applications to produce high quality silage which is available to feed sooner, with superior clamp stability.

For more information on Magniva inoculants, speak to your Feed Specialist.

Dean James
Feed Specialist
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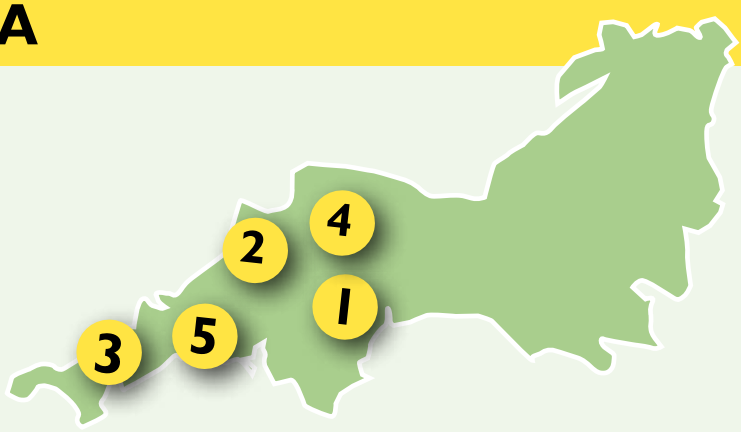
LIFE WITHOUT SOYA

Reducing the carbon footprint of dairy farming remains a major challenge, with reduced dependence on soya making a lot of headlines. But can you milk cows without soya? The answer is yes!

Come along to one of our roadshows and find out how it is possible to feed dairy cows successfully without using soya, helping meet processor requirements and move towards net zero using our innovative Planet Dairy feeds – the first compounds and blends in the UK with zero soya and palm products.



Programme

- Introduction to reducing soya
- Feeding dairy cows without soya – why you can do it
- Carbon footprints of dairy feeds
- The Planet Range of compounds and blends
- User experiences

Find the roadshow nearest to you

1. **Monday 20th February**
   Fingle Glen Golf Club, Tedburn St Mary, EX6 6AF
2. **Tuesday 21st February**
   Holsworthy Golf Club, EX22 6LP
3. **Wednesday 22nd February**
   Penventon Hotel, Redruth, TR15 1TE (for Satnav use TR15 3AD)
4. **Thursday 23rd February**
   South Molton Rugby Club, EX36 3LH
5. **Friday 24th February**
   Lanhydrock Hotel and Golf Club, Bodmin, PL30 5AQ

All meetings will be 11am -1pm. Lunch will be provided.
For more details call us on 01409-254 300 or speak to your Feed Specialist

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