

DRY COWS – THE MOST IMPORTANT COWS ON THE FARM

How do you feed your dry cows and prepare them for a good start in their next lactation? Ask 10 dairy farmers this question, you could easily get 10 different answers depending on a wide range of factors, including breed of cow, average yield, time of year, forages available at the time, housing limitation, work load and so on.

Whatever you do, the basics remain the same. Assessing the condition score of your cows regularly is essential. A condition score of 2.75-3 is ideal at the end of lactation going into the dry period. Fat cows will always cause you more problems than ones on the leaner side. Metabolic issues at calving such as, milk fever, ketosis, displaced abomasum, retained placenta and metritis are all more common in fatter cows.

Feeding a diet that contains plenty of fibrous material to maintain rumen capacity through the dry period will help increase the cow's intake after calving, helping to alleviate energy deficit in early lactation. To ensure cows can make the best possible use of early lactation rations and minimise early lactation energy deficits, some concentrate feeding in the later stages of the dry period will help condition rumen microbial populations. Take advice from your Feed Specialist about the right concentrate to feed on your farm. Aim for a diet with enough energy for the size and breed of the cow with a target protein level of 14%.

Correct mineral feeding in the dry period is also important. Feed a specific dry cow mineral in whatever form suits your system and feed a low calcium diet pre-calving to improve the efficiency with which dietary calcium is absorbed and stimulate increased mobilisation from bone to help reduce the incidence of milk fever.

Try to avoid stress around calving. Moving cows into different groups or separate housing when they are close to calving can cause stress, so it is better to get them settled into a group 2-3 weeks prior to calving and only move them again after they have calved.

Another very important reason for assessing your dry cow rations and procedures is to produce good quality colostrum for the calf. The immunoglobulins in colostrum that the calf relies on to fight infections in the crucial hours immediately after birth are secreted 3-7 weeks before calving. Management of cows in this period needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the calf gets the best start possible.

In the first weeks of life, a calf depends on the absorbed antibodies received through drinking colostrum. To enable this absorption, the gut from the new born calf is temporarily 'open' for these large immunoglobulin antibodies to pass through. This starts to close in the first six hours of life so making sure that calves get 3-4 litres in the first 6 hours of good quality colostrum as soon as possible.

Getting a brix meter to test colostrum quality will help you get some idea if your dry cow management is right. Ask your vet about testing total protein levels in your calves to assess the effectiveness of your new born calf procedures and the calves immune system status.

Giving the calf the best start means getting enough milk into it to keep energy levels high.

The calf's passive immunity from the colostrum starts to drop away within a week of birth and its active immunity does not kick in until around two weeks old, meaning there is an immunity deficit when calves are more vulnerable to infections. Keeping energy levels high will help the calf fight off these infections in this period.

A calf will easily drink 3-4 litres of milk per feed so don't skimp on feeding in this period. Make sure you are feeding a good quality milk powder which does not contain ingredients that the calf cannot digest. Calpride Glow with Bio-Mos (gut conditioner) is our best-selling whey powder that will give your calves a good start in life.

Your Feed Specialist will be pleased to advise and help you with looking at your dry cow management plan. We stock the Calpride range and Energizer milk powders, made using British milk.



Farming thoughts

Finally, the sun has shone, and everyone is catching up on fieldwork. Hopefully, plenty of good quality first cut silage has been made over the last few weeks. One of our customers was zero grazing fresh grass back in the wet spell and it was interesting to see how much grass a cow eats.

We talk often in our newsletters about dry matter and dry matter intakes, but realistically what is the difference between wet grass and average dry grass? The customer's 140 cow herd were eating 12 round bales a day, with grazing at 18% dry matter on a dry day and 18 bales a day on a wet day when grazing was 12% dry matter. We can see now why a cow cannot graze M+20 litres on a wet cold day, she physically cannot graze it!

Our next price drop on feed will be when we receive new crop cereals. Forward prices for next winter are now available.

We have a busy show season ahead of us and look forward to welcoming you onto our stand for a cuppa and catch up. Our next show is Royal Cornwall Show where we are on stand 604, while Massey Harpers will be back on stand 736. We have some exciting launches over the show season and would love to tell you all about them.

Last but by no means least, I must report the passing of Charlie Jenkins. Charlie worked for us in the Bude, Bradworthy and Hartland area before retiring in 2014. He was always a big advocate of Harpers and the Harpers brand. His cheeky character and lively jokes will be sorely missed. His funeral is being held at Kilkhampton Church on Monday 12th June. Tee off time is 12.30.



Glen Johns
Sales Director
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GETTING THE BEST FROM CALVES AT GRAZING

Following a very difficult spring for turning out young cattle and grazing cows and calves, it is important to consider what can be done to keep calves growing and hitting target weights.

Autumn born female dairy calves at 230-275kgs need to grow at 0.8kg/day to reach target bulling weights of 400kg by Christmas. Calves have either gone out into long grass or are being held inside to go out onto aftermaths in June. Calves that are out have had a difficult start and many are behind target growth rates. If they are only getting grass, the solution is 1.5kg/head/day of Harpers 16% Cattle Combine Nuts. This will give them the energy they need to utilise the grass and make up necessary growth.

Calves that go onto aftermaths will need additional forage, either hay or round bale haylage. This will slow down rumen flow and allow them to utilise the nutrients in the grass more efficiently. If grazing is limited, supplement with 1kg/head/day of 16% Cattle Combine Nuts.

Dairy cross beef calves, both male and female, will benefit from a targeted approach. While older calves will handle the conditions better and only need to be supplemented if grass supply is compromised, younger calves, anything under 200kgs will really benefit from 1kg/head/day of Harpers 16% Cattle Combine Nuts. This will get the rumen in the optimum condition to digest grass better as they move through the summer.

The most profitable suckler calves are those finished at 14-18 months and finished in their first winter indoors. To achieve the necessary 300-350 kgs weaning weight by October, calves need to grow faster than 1kg/day.

To get calves ready for indoor forage-based feeding, the rumen needs to be developed to transition from milk digestion to forage digestion. The key nutrient to develop the villi, the finger-like projectiles on the gut wall, is propionic acid. This is produced during the digestion of cereals. Use Harpers 18% Calf Rearing Nuts in a creep feeder and watch the calves grow! There is not a more efficient use of feed than putting it through 2-6-month-old calves.

Coccidiosis Alert

All the conditions we have experienced this spring lead us to a potential storm of Coccidiosis in calves. With warm, wet, and muddy conditions the oocysts will thrive and climb the grass leading to ingestion. To help prevent gut wall damage, talk to your vets about using an in-feed coccidiostat such as Deccox. We can medicate 2 tonne batches at the prescribed rate of decoquinate.

Speak to your Harpers Feed Specialist for more details.



Bill Harper
Director
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EFFICIENT FEED MANAGEMENT

Knowing what's in your feed bin at any time means you will know the best time to pre-order your feed deliveries, so your livestock stay performing at their best.

You can rely on the FeedAlert system to keep tabs of your feed stocks. FeedAlert is an app-based system which allows you to monitor your feed quantity 24/7, so you always know what you have in stock. The system is suitable for all types of silo, using

a weight-based sensor for greater accuracy and it can be fitted retrospectively.

All new silo sales through Collinson come with an offer of 60% off either the Capture or the Envision, inventory control, and 6 months data free of charge.

Any silo, anytime, anywhere.

For more information, speak to your Feed Specialist.



Paul Cholwill
Feed Specialist
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NEW FLEXIBLE FORAGE CROP

Limagrain UK has launched a new hybrid brassica for dairy and beef cattle that can provide two crops in a season. Sown between May and July, Skyfall will provide a leafy forage crop for grazing in 12 weeks, in trials producing 30-35t/ha of a palatable soft-leaved forage.

Where the crop is sown in the earlier part of the growing season, it can be grazed once and then closed up for regrowth before a second grazing period later in the season.

Skyfall has deep narrow roots, which means that it can thrive in drier soils through summer. This deep rooting system and the crop's hybrid vigour supports regrowth, enabling it to 'bounce back' and provide a second grazing crop.

For example, a crop sown in early May can be grazed by the end of July and into August before being closed up for six to eight weeks for regrowth. It can then be grazed for a second time in late September and October.

It is an ideal crop to use as part of a grass reseed programme, sown after first-cut silage or spring grazing. Rather than reseed immediately, Skyfall can be sown and grazed through summer and autumn, and then followed with a grass reseed.

For more information, please speak to your Feed Specialist.



Jake Chisholm
Feed Specialist
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COPING WITH HEAT STRESS

After one of the most drawn-out problematic turnouts since 2012, it is ironic that we now need to think about managing heat stress in the UK.

Global warming is clearly pushing weather extremes further, with longer periods on the cold and wet and equally prolonged spells of high heat, and drier weather. Farming methods need to adapt and adjust to compensate.

During the last twelve months we have seen these extremes demonstrated perfectly. In the summer of 2022, we saw heat stress recorded on 99 days, equivalent to 57% of the summer months of May to mid-September.

To a cow critical heat stress and even life limiting heat stress is anything exceeding 26°C. At these temperatures the cow will very probably exceed her capacity to get rid of the extra body heat which has a big impact on her well-being and performance. Every 0.6°C increase in rectal temperature will see a drop in milk production of half a litre per day.

One thing to be mindful of is that heat stress effects aren't seen on the day of the heat. There is always up to a 48-hour delay between a heat stress event and the consequences - major heat on Monday but the tank is down on the Wednesday.

The reasons behind this are a combination of rumen acidosis, inflammatory response in the hind gut, reduced dry matter intake and increased respiration rate.

As temperature increases, there are significant reductions in intakes and yield. Our goals are simple, namely to keep the cows body temperature at 39.2°C and her respiration rates below 80 per minute. However, they can be hard to manage.

When we look at feeding cows at risk of heat stress, we need to compensate for the lower intakes and increase the available energy to help plug this gap. In hotter climates, which now includes the UK, feeding adlib sodium bicarbonate and higher levels of fibre have been successful. Soya hulls are particularly effective at this time as well as offering hay, or well-made haylage. We want fibre as it generates more heat during the fermentation compared to the starch sources which will aggravate rumen health and even cause acidosis.

Where practical for housed cows feeding more times a day will stimulate activity at the feed fence.

For grazing cows work with the day. In very hot conditions, keep the cows in by day and graze at night. While the shed will be warm, cows will not be subjected to the intense heat from the sun.

Each cow requires from 4 to 6m² of shade which unless you have a handy forest near to the grazing platform is unachievable.

Water is critical. Cool water not warm has been proven to encourage higher intakes and make sure it is clean water. If you would not drink from your water troughs, why would you expect your animals too? Water requirements change with temperature so you need to factor this in. Do you have sufficient trough space and do troughs refill quickly?

There are other things that help reduce heat stress. Water sprayers on the feed passage and collecting yard are not only good for cooling but great for fly reduction too. Fans are obviously a massive help but if fitted poorly can add to the problem. If sited correctly huge blast fans can blow over the backs of the cows ideally in a row allowing total comfort. On one unit that has a thermostatic controller we have already had the fans on in April and May, indicating that the shed has crept over 15°C multiple times. Grants are now available for these fans so they are well worth investigating.

Talk to your Feed Specialist for a full review of your farm and feeding practices during these challenging months.



Richard Waters
Ruminant Feed Specialist &
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DIET CHECK TEMP AND HUMIDITY CALCULATIONS

	12°C	18°C	28°C	30°C
Milk Yield (kg)	30	30	30	30
Weight (kg)	700	700	700	700
Milk fat (g/100g)	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.2
Milk protein (g/100g)	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4
Days calved	50	50	50	50
Average temperature (°C)	12	18	28	30
DM intake (kg/d)	23.4	22.698	21.294	19.188
% Reduction in DM	0	3%	9%	18%
ME (MJ/d)	267	259	243	218.9
Milk from ME (kg)	34.8	33.8	31.7	28.2

WATER INTAKE REQUIREMENTS

Animal	Water intake at 5°C (Litres)	Water intake at 15°C (Litres)	Water intake at 26°C (Litres)
Heifer 200kg	12	17	24
In-calf Heifer 550kg	33	41	54
Dry Cow 640kg	40	50	70++
Milking cow 25l/day	90	110	130++
Milking cow 50l/day	120	140	180++

Data reference Dr Tom Chamberlain at Chalcombe Ltd

GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS

The extension of the Ukrainian grain corridor for a further 60 days on the 18th May continues to put pressure on cereal prices, particularly on the new crop.

Old crop supplies of barley seem to have tightened in the Southwest as the UK remains competitive on exports. Wheat is different and it is reported the UK will have a 2.2 million carry over. Old crop wheat is now less than a £5 per tonne premium over barley due to plentiful supplies both domestically and globally. Both Russia and Europe still have large supplies of grain available.

Currently with wheat trading at around £180 per tonne ex-combine and barley around a £15 per tonne discount, they are by far the cheapest ingredients and it is very difficult to see how much further prices can fall, even allowing for the large stock everywhere. Risks remain around the Black Sea corridor and global demand is still greater than production, so we don't want any supply issues, such as weather or political issues to occur. We will have to remember the Ukraine production will be down for several years, this year their wheat crop will be 15 million tonnes lower than last year at 18 million tonnes.

With an increase in the Brazilian soya crop of a record 155 million tonnes and with more supplies becoming available, we are starting to see pressure on prices.

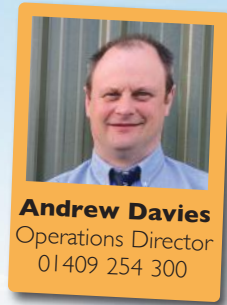
The increase in Brazilian soya has offset the disaster in Argentina. A good crop is expected, above 120 million tonnes in North America as planting progress goes above the 50% mark.

Pressure remains on rape meal prices as there is a plentiful supply of oilseed rape with European plantings up 10%. Oilseed Rape prices fell below €400 for the first time since 2020 recently.

With the price of cereals, pressure is starting to mount on other products such as soya hulls and sugar beet pulp. Supplies of sugar beet will remain in short supply until new crop, but a bigger crop is expected with the crop currently looking in good condition.

After the past two years, all prices need to readjust but the big question is where will they find their new levels?

For more information on any of these points, please call the office on 01409 254 300.



NEW FACE IN THE SALES TEAM

We are delighted to welcome Lilly Cochrane back at Harpers Feeds, returning to the sales team full time after spending the last 9 months dairy farming down under.

Lilly says it was great to experience a different way of farming, seeing how different countries manage factors affecting performance such as heat, space, light, rest, feed, and airflow.

She started in Canterbury, New Zealand on a milking herd of 1600 before working across three dairies in Australia with a total of 1300 cows, playing a large role in their 3-month block calving, one farm per month, seeing up to 30 calves a day at peak!

After working on several different types of farms across North Devon for 6 years, Lilly attended the Royal Agricultural University at Cirencester, where she obtained her degree in Agricultural business.

Lilly is passionate about the industry and will be working in the North Devon area. She is very keen to support farmers and their livestock in any way possible and looks forward to meeting customers over the coming weeks.

Contact Lilly on 07702874763



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Event	Date	Location
16-18th June	Three Counties Show (Massey Harpers)	Malvern, WR13 6NW
20-21st June	Royal Cheshire Show (Massey Harpers)	Knutsford, WA16 0HJ
21st June	Down 2 Earth	Haselbury Plucknett, TA18 7PH
8th July	Liskeard Show	Merrymeet, PL14 3LE
22nd July	Mid Devon Show	Tiverton, EX16 7PP
26th July	Yealmpton Show	Kitley Lawn, PL8 2NN
27th July	Launceston Show	Launceston PL15 7EZ
30th July	Totnes Show	Totnes TQ9 6LE
31st July	Woolery Show	Clovelly Court, EX39 5SY
2nd August	North Devon Show	Umberleigh, EX37 8DX
3rd August	Honiton Show	Gittisham, EX14 3AW



Harpers Feeds

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