



## ADVICE FOR FEEDING YOUNGSTOCK AT GRASS



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### Beef and dairy youngstock are likely to require supplementary feeding following a difficult start to the grazing season.

Farmers can often treat youngstock as herd 'cinderellas' and focus their best-quality feed for milking cows.

In this scenario, it can be tempting to use youngstock to clean out paddocks after milking cows or older growing animals.

But using dairy heifers or beef youngstock as a 'poor relation' will adversely affect growth rates.

Youngstock need to be fed as well, if not better, than milking cows. They are the next generation of your herd, and they can often be overlooked and under-nourished.

### SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING

Instead, consider plate-metering to monitor grass availability and take regular grass samples to see if supplementary feeding is required.

Later in the summer calves can be standing still, if not losing weight. The reason for this is twofold: grass dry matter goes up, which reduces the protein and energy of the grass, and there is less of it.

To balance this energy deficiency, supplementary feeding may be required.

Taking grass samples will help you understand how much protein you need and could help you save money by allowing you to feed a lower percentage of protein.

Ideally, fields should be plate-metered before animals are turned in to graze them, and grass samples can be taken at the same time.

This will give you an idea of how many days of grazing you have in front of you and will dictate how much protein is required in the cake.

### MONITORING GROWTH RATES

If practical, youngstock should be weighed every 4-6 weeks to see if they are on track.

A dairy heifer should be 55% of its mature body weight at breeding. This will differ from farm to farm, so it is best to calculate your farm's average cow weight and assess daily youngstock growth rate targets.

Typically, dairy heifers need to achieve 0.85kg/day from birth to ensure they are adequately grown for that all-important two-year-calving.

Meanwhile, growing cattle require 2-2.5% dry matter intake of their liveweight to achieve good growth rates. For example, a 250kg animal requires 6.25kg DM daily.

As a rule of thumb, youngstock should be fed 2kg per 100kg of liveweight plus 1kg per 100kg thereafter. For example, a dairy heifer weighing 140kg would require 3kg a head a day.

Currently, grazing conditions are challenging because poor weather conditions have stalled turnout.

A lot of spring-calving heifers have had a very delayed turnout. Management is going to be difficult because there is so much grass and wastage will be high.

To manage this, consider using toppers and mowers strategically to maintain quality and dry matter intakes.

Where grass is not supporting energy requirements, Harpers can supply 14-18% protein Rearing Nuts for dairy youngstock and 16% Cattle Combine Nuts for beef youngstock.

For more information, contact your Feed Specialist.

## TOP TIPS

### FOR MANAGING YOUNGSTOCK AT GRASS

- ✓ Plate meter before turning animals into fields to allow accurate allocation of grass.
- ✓ Grass sample to monitor grass protein and energy levels. Ask your Harpers Feed Specialist for more information about our grass-testing services.
- ✓ Work out growth rate requirements and weigh youngstock every 4-6 weeks, where practical, to monitor progress.
- ✓ If grass covers are high, consider taking a cut of silage or making bales from that field or use toppers to maintain quality.
- ✓ Remember, youngstock will not graze high grass covers – graze at the two-leaf stage rather than the three-leaf stage (2,400-2,500kg of dry matter per hectare).
- ✓ Aim for a target residual of 1,500 kg of DM/ha or a 4cm sward height.
- ✓ Use troughs, if possible, to prevent wildlife seeking feed.
- ✓ If using a snacker, remember to calibrate it regularly to check you are feeding the correct quantities.



# THE 5 QS OF COLOSTRUM TO ACHIEVE 'LIQUID GOLD'

The first few hours of a calf's life are vital to their future productivity and resilience. Feeding good-quality colostrum at high volumes is key to kickstart a calf's career.

This is best achieved sticking to the 5 Qs of Colostrum:

**1 QUALITY** – 'Good quality' colostrum is deemed >50g igG/litre of colostrum and the average cow produces 41g/igG litre. The use of a refractometer is an easy tool to measure colostrum with a BRIX reading and should only be fed at 22% and above. The longer colostrum sits around waiting to be fed, the quicker the quality is decreasing.

**2 QUANTITY** – 4L of quality colostrum should be fed as soon as possible after birth. If the calf is willing to drink more colostrum and its available, then allow more.

**3 QUICKLY** – 2 things; Milking the dam as quickly as possible gives best chances of harvesting quality colostrum and it must be fed quickly. Calves are born without an immune system, so the quicker they have the source of igG, the sooner the energy kickstarts the immune system.

**4 SQUEAKY CLEAN** – Colostrum must be clean. Bacteria contamination can be picked up through how colostrum is stored and fed. Its important to feed colostrum quickly, because the bacteria population is doubling every 20 minutes!

**5 QUANTIFY** – Checking calves blood serum levels is a good indicator of TP (total proteins) that have been absorbed by the blood and should measure above 5.5%. This will indicate how effective your colostrum management is. Speak to your vet about testing.



Scan the QR code for further information on the 5 Qs!



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## FARMING THOUGHTS

**I've just returned from two conferences in the last week. Firstly, Transition Live hosted by Farmers Weekly, and Feeding the Future Together, hosted by Trouw Nutrition GB.**

The word sustainability is used all the time now and I wish the media would change the buzzword to efficiency or profitability, because more farmers would buy into it. If you are being more efficient, you are being more sustainable!

It is worrying no one really talked about food security at either of the conferences. Within the next month we are likely to see a change of government. It will be interesting to see their manifestos on food security.

The show season is now upon us. Please pop in for a cuppa and chat. We will be doing some great deals and are launching our new Triple Top range of feeds. Come and speak to the team to find out more.



**Glen Johns**  
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## GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS MARKETS

**The last month has seen a rally in ingredient prices, particularly for new crop cereals prices. One reason has been that funds have been buying ingredients sparked mainly by worldwide weather events.**

Wheat has increased by around £30/tonne. Dry weather in Russia, followed by late frosts, has downgraded their wheat crop from a record 94m tonnes to 86m tonnes or lower. The Ukrainian wheat crop is also being downgraded from 21m tonnes to 19m tonnes. Meanwhile, the wheat crop in the UK is predicted to be 10-11.5m tonnes, down from 14m tonnes last year. However, there is going to be a 1.5m tonne carryover. With imported maize grain selling for a £10-15/t discount, this is likely to reduce the shortfall.

Ensus wheat demand of 800,000 tonnes has already switched to maize and the likelihood is that a lot of feed requirements will also be switched.

New crop barley is now trading at a £25-30/tonne discount, as many spring plantings have been completed. This all points to wheat prices falling unless maize prices increase.

Proteins have also increased in price by £30/tonne and soya is back around £400/tonne with global stocks buoyant. The Brazilian soya crop has been downgraded, but any shortfalls will be made up by the increase in the Argentinian harvest.

Rape plantings are down across the UK and Europe, so prices look expensive against other proteins, such as soya, distillers and sunflower.

At the time of writing, we are still unable to buy soya products from 1 January 2025, but we hope there will be a resolution soon. The likelihood is that the EU deforestation regulations will be deferred.



**Andrew Davies**  
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Our blending plant will be down for maintenance from **7th June to 14th June**, we apologise for any inconvenience.



# ADVICE FOR FINISHING CATTLE AT GRASS

**If you have beef cattle that weigh 350-450kgs, you can give them the best opportunity to finish off grass in September.**

As they graze the first round of grass, they will grow quickly, aided by the high levels of protein in the grass (currently 17-19%), which will help them grow frame. As the protein in the grass reduces through June, we must change the dynamics of the digestion to encourage muscle and finish levels.

We have all been in the position in September where cattle have grown well at grass, but while they are up to weight, they do not carry enough finish to be fit for slaughter. As soon as the grass loses its high protein levels, we need to drive dry matter intakes to ensure a good level of finish.

To achieve this, we need to increase rumen microbial activity. This can be done by including cereal and protein to stimulate intake. Most of the time, cattle are limited, not by the amount of forage available, but by the rate of flow through the rumen.

The microbes that digest forage require a combination of sugar, starch, and proteins to boost the numbers of these forage-digesting friends.

Feeding 2-3kgs/head/day of our Triple Top Beef Nuts will drive the availability of nutrients to the animal. Our new Triple Top beef feed combines wheat, maize and barley with highly digestible proteins and sugars. Using all three cereals will give the best balance of supply of nutrients due to their different rates of degradation in the rumen. Cubing this diet into a nut will also give you a cooking factor – the diet reaches 65°C during the process which pre-digests the starch into a more available form. Feeding Triple Top Beef Nuts in troughs is clean and easy to handle with no dust. Triple Top also contains Levucell live yeast which scavenges oxygen that is not needed in an anaerobic rumen digestion system. This allows the pH to be raised increasing the activity of rumen microbes. Levucell also aids the digestion of fibre particularly lignin, allowing the digestion to the hemi-cellulose within the plant leaf.



Feeding should commence in July so that cattle can be finished in September. The added benefit of feeding daily is that cattle become quieter and easier to handle when you want to move them.

With the beef trade looking steady going forward, there seem to be fewer seasonal price fluctuations, so autumn finishing can be just as profitable as winter finishing.

For more details, come to the launch of the Triple Top feeds at the Royal Cornwall Show on stand 604.



## ALTERING TRANSITION RATIIONS

**When farm manager Gareth Wyn-Evans took over running the Harvey family's 260-cow pedigree Jersey herd four years ago, his goals were to reduce disease and lift milk yields.**

One key area of focus has been transition management. The farm has no accommodation which meant staff were not on hand 24/7 to deal with cows with milk fever.

Jerseys are notorious for milk fever, due in part to the high-component-rich milk they produce, which requires a higher mineral status at calving.

Whilst cases of milk fever were relatively low annually (about eight cases), Gareth's preferred option is prevention rather than cure as he and the team were demoralised seeing downer cows. Jerseys can be slow to respond to treatment and require several bottles of calcium.

Previously, transition cows were fed a partial DCAB diet alongside a dry cow mineral and 150g per head of magnesium flakes.

Working alongside Steve Jones from Harpers Feeds, 18 months ago Gareth switched to feeding the calcium and phosphorus binder X-Zelit.

It reduces the quantity of calcium in the small intestine, stimulating the cow to mobilise her own calcium reserves to prevent milk fever.

It is much kinder to the cow than a DCAB diet because it does not acidify the cow's blood.

X-Zelit is fed at 500g a head a day for two weeks before calving alongside grass silage, straw, a pre-calving mineral, and a balance of two blends (see close-up diet in box 2).

Since switching to the binder, clinical cases of milk fever have been non-existent.

Everything is up and calved much quicker and the farm doesn't get retained cleansings and has very low rates of ketosis, perhaps one per block.

The binder costs £1.70/cow/day, but the lower incidence of transition disease makes it a sound investment.

Improved transition management has underpinned an improvement in milk yields – since 2019, these have risen by 30% to over 5,000 litres. Meanwhile, cows are maintaining high levels of constituents (6.27% butterfat and 4.08% protein).

Improved transition cow management and feeding have also aided advances in fertility.

The calving period has been cut back from 18 weeks to 11. In the spring mob, 93 calved in February out of 130 cows.

Cows are hitting peak yield much quicker and are doing 30+ litres within six weeks of calving.

### CLOSE-UP RATION (FRESHWEIGHT PER HEAD PER DAY)

- **22kg** grass-silage
- **4kg** wheat straw
- **100g** pre-calver mineral
- **500g** of X-Zelit
- **600g** Planet Nova 40 Dry Mix (rapeseed and protected rapeseed)
- **2.1kg** of Starch blend

### FARM FACTS

- Milking 260 pedigree Jerseys, split block calving,
- Calving for 11 weeks from February and again in August
- Grazing from March until October
- Cows milked through a 20:20 rapid exit parlour
- Yielding 5,137 litres of milk at 6.27% butterfat and 4.08% protein
- Farming 320 acres
- Milk is supplied to the Harvey family's nearby processing plant, Langage Farm.



# GEARING UP FOR GAME SEASON

**As I write this article, we are still receiving excessive amounts of rainfall following one of the wettest springs on record.**



This has made the start of the 2024 game season a challenging one, with laying hens appearing to be behind on egg production and game farmers struggling to construct the rearing field in time for the arrival of chicks. The threat of Avian Flu also remains a concern, as well as the pressure on industry policy and sustainability challenges.

However, on a more positive note, the price of game feed has reduced from last season, with costs of raw materials such as wheat and hipro soya bean meal reducing for the summer. The complete range of game feed is fixed formulated for the season, using only the best quality ingredients to supply nutrition that will achieve fitter and healthier birds. The use of immune stimulants such as Bio-mos and Aviance in our Starter and Grower diets helps improve

feed conversion rates, increase weight gain, and contribute to a well-balanced micro-flora in the bird's digestive system.

To provide customers with the best service possible, we continue to expand our fleet of bulk and bag lorries. This year we can offer forklifts on the back of all the flatbed lorries so drivers can unload themselves.

We have also made mill investments, updating our crumbler and sieving equipment, to guarantee that feeds are produced consistently and to the highest standard. The palatability and digestibility of game feed are invaluable, and every diet is constructed to support the healthy growth and development throughout each stage of the bird's life.

*For more information on our County Game Feeds, please speak to your local Feed Specialist or call us on 01409 254 300.*

**This year the Youngstock Conference hosted by NMR and Cow Management is being held locally at Sandy Park, Exeter on Thursday 18th July.** We want to encourage more conferences to be held in the Westcountry so we are offering discounted tickets, please speak to your Feed Specialist for details. First come first serve basis applies.

## WEANING LAMBS FOR THE TARGET MARKET

**What a turnaround in the weather. All ewes, whether lowland or upland, have had a challenging lambing, but grass growth has now turned a corner as the temperatures start to rise.**

We must now turn our attention to this year's lambing crops. Prices for finished early-season lambs have been strong. With grass growth coming on and creep feeders already in many fields, we would suggest finishing lambs. Lamb Start 2 Finish Pellets have a balance of starch and fibre which means they will work well alongside the fresh grass to give a well-fleshed

carcass. We have had several customers killing lambs to specification within 12 weeks of birth, before weaning and turning a great profit with the current price.

Others have reported that ewes have struggled with the wet spring and lambs haven't taken to grass well due to lower milk availability. Keep an eye on struggling lambs or begin feeding. These lambs will be grazing the fresh grass and could well be loose in their muck due to high protein levels. Faecal egg counts are available in store through Massey Harpers, so if there is any doubt get some samples in. Georgie Beer is in store on a Wednesday for advice.

For those intending to sell lambs at later markets or for breeding, it is important to measure growth to ensure lambs hit the desired weights. Days on farm have a big influence on profit with lambs at grass still carrying a cost (fertiliser, labour, etc). However, remember that a good lamb will always sell better than a poor lamb. With later-fed lambs, we would suggest switching to lamb finisher nuts after weaning to give a strong, well-grown and fleshed lamb for the target market.



**Jake Chisholm**  
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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**We look forward to seeing you at events throughout the rest of the year. Make sure to pop in and see us.**

Event	Date	Location
Royal Cornwall Show	Thursday 6th – Saturday 8th June	Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge, PL27 7JE
Liskeard Show	Saturday 13th July	Merrymeet, PL14 3LE
Launceston Show	Thursday 25th July	Launceston PL15 7EZ
Mid Devon Show	Saturday 27th July	Tiverton, EX16 7PP
Totnes Show	Sunday 28th July	<b>Massey Harpers stand</b> , Totnes TQ9 6LE
Woolery Show	Monday 29th July	Clovelly Court, EX39 5SY
Yealmpton Show	Wednesday 31st July	<b>Massey Harpers stand</b> , Kitley Lawn, PL8 2NN
Honiton Show	Thursday 1st August	Gittisham, EX14 3AW
North Devon Show	Wednesday 7th August	Umberleigh, EX37 8DX