

GRASS IS GROWING

Season to Date:

The warm weather in the last week or so has helped kick off pasture growth, especially in the southwest region. With the 28-day forecast predicting continuing rain in the Southwest and Great Southern regions it's looking to be a reasonable season. The change over from silage/hay to fresh pasture on rain fed farms is beginning, and it's important to remember to transition the herd slowly.

Autumn Pasture Transition:

First grazings on the fresh autumn pasture are characterised by lower fibre, high energy and high protein. The NDF levels of the pasture will be lower than later season and so saliva production is generally less, and so using early season pasture as a standalone forage source can be a cause for concern. Saliva plays an important part in rumen function, providing a pH buffering effect on acids. Less saliva can result in decreased rumen pH leading to subclinical or clinical ruminal acidosis. To avoid this, transition cows slowly and supply them with hay or silage with a higher NDF during this time. A good way to monitor fibre content in the diet is to monitor the herds manure. Loose runny manure, like on the far right in the picture below, is indicative of a low fibre ration. The herds milk fat percentage is also an indication, low fibre will result in a lower milk fat test.

Along with monitoring fibre content of the ration, the other aspect is ration mineral content, as there can be some concerns with the first grazings. One of these being nitrate toxicity, which can be aggravated where weeds such as capeweed are being grazed. Mineralisation of soil nitrogen following the first rains can result in excessive plant nitrate levels, and high nitrate consumed.

The others concerns are low magnesium and high potassium levels in early season pasture, potentially resulting in hypomagnesaemia (grass tetany/staggers) and associated hypocalcaemia. Symptoms of hypomagnesaemia can include aggression, staggering and convulsions. Hypocalcaemia can result when cows have low plasma concentrations of magnesium and high dietary intake of potassium, high potassium intake can cause blood calcium levels to fall and thus the two illnesses will commonly occur concurrently.

In the first round of grazing on rain fed farms there is a need to establish the grazing wedge. Natural seed set paddocks may be ready to be grazed earlier than seeded paddocks, this can help get the wedge set by grazing these self-seeded paddocks first. With differing maturing paddocks the best practise 3 leaf grazing system is easier to implement. First grazes may need to occur at a shorter grazing length depending on how fast feed is accumulating on farm.

Upcoming Events:

Stepping Up/Stepping Back Workshop – Bunbury 25th May 2016. Limited places, RSVP's essential. Contact Jessica for more information: jessica@westerndairy.com.au

Young Dairy Network Sponsoring a young farmer to attend Dairy Research Foundation Symposium in June – contact Jessica for an application form or more information.



Image 1. Manure consistency examples



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