

July 2012

# Late Summer Feeding of Dairy Cows

During summer and autumn there can be an over reliance on grazing which leads to a shortfall in the energy status of cows impacting on milk yields and fertility. The DM content of grass decreases and grass growth rate declines, as does its digestibility. This results in negative energy balance and the loss of body condition typically in high yielders in early lactation, which will have a significant impact on their subsequent fertility.

## Monitor Body condition

Regular body condition scoring can be used to monitor how cows are managing at grass. A more scientific way is to test blood ketone levels of cows that are 40-50 days calved. This assesses how well the current diet is meeting the energy requirements of high yielding cows.

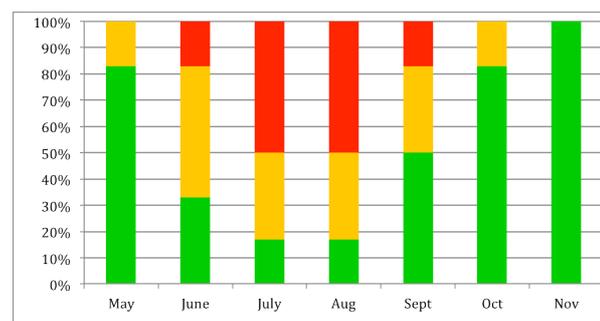
Cows in negative energy balance will break down fat to compensate and produce ketones which can be measured with a simple on farm blood test using a Ketone meter.



The graph below shows the ketone levels found on one farm where at the routine visit 6 cows calved 40-50 days were blood sampled each month and tested for ketones.

The aim is to keep as many cows as possible in the green and as few as possible in the red.

The graph shows a worsening trend in the freshly calved cows which was only rectified in October when the cows were housed and moved onto full winter rations.



## Taking action

- Group the more at risk cows so that they can be buffer fed.
- Make sure there is enough trough space to allow all cows to feed at same time- 0.75m / cow.
- Ensure good trough and silage pit management to minimise the ration heating up.
- Provide easily accessible, clean drinking

water.

- Buffer feed for 2-4 hours **before** afternoon milking because in the evenings the grass will contain higher amounts of sugars and have a higher dry matter content providing good, cheap grazing.



### Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme

The second round of applications for grants under the Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme opened on 22<sup>nd</sup> May and closes on July 17<sup>th</sup>.

Grants of between £2500 and £25,000 are available for a number of items for livestock farmers which will bring about significant improvements in Animal Health and Welfare.

Examples of eligible items include, Sheep – weigh crates, turning crates, mobile handling systems, EID readers. Cattle- upgrade of cattle crush, foot trimming facilities, computer software to assist in the monitoring of herd health, cow mattresses, cluster flushing systems, heat detection systems

For more information visit the Rural Development Programme for England website:

[www.rdpnetwork.defra.gov.uk](http://www.rdpnetwork.defra.gov.uk).

### Farmskills Bull Fertility Workshops

We are holding a Farmskills Bull Fertility workshop supported by EBLEX on a local farm on Wednesday July 18<sup>th</sup> at Spath Farmhouse, Spath, nr Uttoxeter. Storer Smith Simmentals have kindly allowed us to use their facilities.

This will be led by John Kirk and John Cammack and will include a talk on bull fertility and soundness testing and a practical component, which involves a full examination of breeding bulls including semen collection by electro-ejaculation and microscopic examination. The workshop is planned to start at 11:45.

The workshop will be limited to 6-8 participants so please contact the farm office to register your interest.