

## Get Your Cows Ready for Spring Turnout

The evenings are drawing out, and aside from the poor weather we have seen recently, it is time to start considering turning out cattle for spring.

Careful planning for transition cows from a grass-silage based ration to spring grazing will help reduce the chance of disruption to cows' health and performance.

There are significant nutritional differences between grass silage and spring grass. Without careful transition from one to another, we may see digestive upset and lowered milk production. Spring grass has a higher level of sugar than grass silage, along with lower dry matter levels and low fibre levels. The cow relies on microflora in the rumen to aid digestion, and, after a change in diet, it takes around 3 weeks for these microbes to adapt.



Low fibre levels in leafy spring grass reduce the 'scratch factor' in the rumen. This reduces the level of saliva production and reduces cudging rates. Reduction in cudging and saliva production will be followed by reduced milk production.

Dry matter content in spring grass can vary day-to-day due to environmental factors, especially with the turbulent weather we have seen over the last few weeks. Spring grass may contain 90% water. Variations have been seen in dry matter content of spring grass from 10-18%. The daily fluctuation in a cow's dry matter intake can therefore be substantial in the spring.

Crude protein content in grass can also vary depending on rate and timing of fertiliser used. Protein taken from grass is broken down by rumen microbes and then digested by the cow. Excess protein is broken down to ammonia, entering the cows bloodstream being converted to urea by the liver. Following turnout, milk urea levels may increase, and levels should be kept below 300mg/L. Providing a buffer feed of high energy, lower protein forages or concentrates can help with rebalancing the diet. Buffer feed options include Maize, Whole-crop Silage or High Fibre Cake. Increasing the fibre in the diet will also help maintain butterfat levels.

Monitoring bulk milk butterfat and protein levels will allow you to detect issues with the diet before they become clinical. Dropping butterfat in the milk could be a sign of digestive issues such as sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA). If the rumen pH falls for a few hours a day below 5.8, then cows may start to show signs of SARA. The microbes in the rumen cannot degrade fibre and will die off with a sub-optimal pH. Reduced fibre digestion increases the risk of SARA. Gradually increasing access to grass for a few hours each day over a few weeks will help reduce to reduce the risk of SARA, and the impact of nutritional upset.

Mineral imbalances can also occur when cows are turned out onto lush grass. Hypomagnesemia (Grass Staggers) is a significant risk, due to lack of magnesium absorption. It can cause convulsions and sudden death. Rapid digestion with reduced fibre in spring grass increases this risk. Mineral boluses containing magnesium, magnesium flakes in water, and a high-fibre buffer feed will help reduce the likelihood of grass staggers at turnout.



We are delighted to say that we have **Calciject No 5** back in stock, which contains magnesium as well as calcium. Spring turnout is the time of highest risk for low magnesium levels, so this product is ideal for any cases of milk fever that might occur at the moment. **If several cases are seen, please let us know, as we can investigate to look the causes and how we can prevent further cases.**

## WEAK LAMBS/ABORTIONS THIS YEAR?

If this was an issue for your flock this year, there is a subsidised testing available to look for the most common, preventable causes. We are able to offer subsidised testing, supported by the drug companies MSD and CEVA, who both run schemes where they will pay the lab fees for blood tests to look for Toxoplasma or Enzootic Abortion in ewes which either aborted or had weak lambs. There are also other diseases that we can look for such as border disease or mineral deficiencies at extra cost. So, if you did have any of these issues, please contact us to get your barren ewes tested before you sell them.

There are vaccines available for the most common causes, which mean that these problems can be prevented next year.



## Effect of Calving Difficulty on Suckler Cow Performance

Calving difficulties can affect the subsequent performance of the cow in four ways:

- A reduction in milk yield
- An equivalent reduction in calf weaning weight
- A delay in the return to normal oestrus cycles due to endometritis
- A more severe delay which results in the cow being barren, particularly for late calving cows in seasonal block calving herds

The magnitude of these losses would depend on the degree of calving difficulty as illustrated in the table below:

Calving difficulty (1-5 scale)	3	4	5
% drop in lactation yield	10	10	15
Equivalent reduction in calf weaning weight (kg)	15	15	25
Delays in re-breeding (days)	5	20	40
Increased risk of barrenness (%)	20	50	75
Total cows (£/affected cow)	81	189	298

The AHDB Beef and Lamb calving difficulty scale is defined as follows:

Score 2: Slight assistance, no equipment used

Score 3: Mechanical assistance with a calving aid by the farmer

Score 4: Veterinary assistance

Score 5: Veterinary assistance for severe dystocia including surgical intervention

The key points to achieve fewer calving difficulties are nutrition of the cow in late pregnancy to ensure she is fit but not over fat and genetics. Now is the time to talk about genetics ahead of the breeding period. Fortunately, this year maternal EBVs for ease of calving will become available for some breeds including Charolais and Limousin to help producers identify bulls whose daughters will be easy calving. This is in addition to the current calving ease EBV which experience has shown helps select sires whose calves are born easily.

If you are interested in further information on EBVs for calving ease, please speak to one of the vets.

### PARASITE UPDATE

We are now in the high-risk period for Nematodirus in young lambs, but due to the weather conditions, we have already seen strongyle worms in some worm egg counts. Therefore, before treating lambs we would advise performing worm egg counts – if there are any trichostrongyle worms present, the usual advice to use a white drench at this time of year should not be followed, due to the high likelihood of resistance. A yellow or clear drench is more likely to be effective on most farms. If there are no trichostrongyles present, a white wormer should be used against Nematodirus.

We have these products in stock at competitive prices, as well as cattle wormers including Taurador (a long acting product very similar to Dectomax).