Practical Feeding Options for Winter 2018

After a slow Autumn Break and with demand for fodder from the Northern states driving up demand and pricing what are some practical things we can do to feed stock through winter 2018.

First thing you need know is what you have on hand. How much local Hay and silage do you have? How much pasture and what are my cows consuming? Do you have calf feed in a silo? What do I have available to buy in?

Home grown feed is the first Do I have enough grass and when do I need it? This answer will vary from farm to farm. If the answer is no then what can we do to either 1) grow more or 2) fill the feed gap with other feed

If the answer is no and you want to grow more grass there are some tools that we can use to help. Nitrogen is one tool we can use and with average winter growth rates of 15 to 25 kg of DM per day boosting this can help to feed our cows more pasture. If we can get a 10 to 1 response from nitrogen on a 45 day round we will grow an extra 450kg of DM for that grazing. If we have used the rule of thumb of 1kg N per day and we have applied 46kg of N (100kg Urea @$600/t) and it has cost 13 cents per kg of DM or $133 per tonne. Stacks up pretty well when concentrate and hay prices are high.

Gibberellic acid is another option which works best in the colder months where the plant naturally doesn't produce as much of this hormone. It can also be mixed with your broadleaf sprays to help take out competition and encourage increased plant growth.

If growing more Grass isn't going to be an option and you need to buy in feed then how do you assess other options. The best way to work out bang for buck is by working out what brought in feed is costing you per MJ of ME.

For a late lactation dairy cow producing 12 litres she will require roughly 130 MJ of ME per day. Conversely a fresh cow producing 30 litres will require 230 MJ of ME per day. Regardless of what total litres these cows are producing the Milk price to Grain price ratio will remain the same. What changes is how you assess the risk involved from feeding.

Using your current months Milk price in cents/kg Milk solids (665) divided by the cost of your Concentrate in cents per kg. EG your is concentrate costing $390 per tonne and is 90% DM then it is (390/90%) to get $433 cents per KG DM. We then divide it by 1000kgs to get the cents per kg price eg 433. When deciding to feed Grain on a purely margin response basis we need to be greater than 1.30 and preferable 1.50. so 665 / 433 is 1.53. So this is fine in July but what about when the milk price changes as we move towards spring. If grain stays the same but the August milk price is 5.20 per kg MS suddenly we are at a ratio of 1.2 and other factors need to be taken into account.

Look at your grazing rotation. Current leaf appearance rates are 14 to 20 days. So if we are looking to target a 2 and a half to 3 leaf stage at grazing we are looking at a 40 to 50 day round. If daily growth rates are between 15 to 25kg per day. With an average residual of 1200kg and 40 days growth at 15kg per day there would be 600kg/ha available for grazing. If you are wanting each cow to eat 12kg of grass then your stocking rate would be 50 cows per ha/per 24 hours. For a 100 ha farm with 250 cows is this growth rate enough or do we need to help growth with nitrogen and gibberellic acid? We would need to increase growth to 30kg/day to get to a 40 day rotation so look

at your options. Ideally with an average leaf emergence rate of 15 to 20 days in winter we would like to get to a 45 to 60 day rotation. The main reasoning for this is so the plant can send some energy reserves v=back to the root system to repair and grow post grazing.

Look at your grazing residuals. Your cows are very good at letting you know if they are still hungry. But are they making the most of what is in front of them? Good grazing residual of 5cm between clumps is ideal. If the residual is longer the cows are leaving some behind. If the residual is shorter then are you able to give them a bigger allocation?

Watch your cows, let them tell you what is going on. If you are getting an ammonia smell in the dairy as a general rule there is too much protein in their diet. Can you change your ration to alleviate this problem? How do the cows react when you enter the paddock? Are they fast or slow when walking to and from the dairy. These may all give an indication of what is happening before you see a change in the vat or your solids.