

Wet, Wet, Wet

By Gerard Murphy of GDM Agricultural Consulting

The good news is we are 2/3rds of the way through Winter! Woohoo. The bad news is that it is pretty wet on farms in South Gippsland. From what I have been seeing so far this winter farmers have done a really good job of managing the wet conditions.

In such conditions what are some of the practical solutions farmers have used that have worked so far.

I have seen a variety of methods used to try and minimise the damage to pastures. Some are giving cows access to silage straight out of the dairy. Other farmers are using on /off grazing where cows are getting grass until lunchtime and then are moved off and given silage.

Where they are given access to the silage can vary. If you have a feedpad then that is great, or an area with hay rings or feeders with a solid base. If you don't have them then look for an area of laneway that is solid and not prone to breaking down, or an old unused laneway.

Due to the excellent summer and early autumn conditions the carryover of fodder in the form of silage has been quite common. I believe this has had an influence in how well we have been able to handle the wet conditions. This has taken the pressure off pasture consumption and helped to stop cows walking the paddock looking for feed. The pasture wedge going into winter and pasture growth rates has also help with ground cover holding things together.

I have seen some farmers using a sacrifice system where cows are getting grass in the day and then sacrifice paddock and silage at night. This has its merits but also be aware that the sacrifice paddock needs to be a drier paddock (if that's possible) or is part of the forward planning process and is identified as a paddock that is going to be summer cropped. It is wise to consider having 3 to 4 sacrifice paddocks that you can rotate every 4 to 5 days to try and give them a break.

With winter / spring calving in full swing some farmers are standing springing cows on the yard for a period. This option has its merits but also be aware there may be some issues with feet. It may be worth talking to your nutritionist if you are doing this as you may be able to alter the feed to help combat issues with soft feet. The addition of organic Zinc can help to harden the hoof in the shorter term.

Forward planning on farm from here is critical. If you have a sacrifice paddock that is wrecked, consider putting it into an early regrowth forage crop with the aim to graze it in December and regraze in February. You could plan a turnip crop around this with the aim to graze the turnips in January. Consider organising fertiliser now for early September for some of the drier areas of your farm to boost pasture production and help create a surplus to lead into silage conservation.

With the end of winter drawing closer (I have noticed some of the roadside wattles are flowering) we want to make sure we can take full advantage of the warmer spring conditions. If we continue to manage the wet conditions now and do some forward planning, we will go a long way to succeeding.