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Beef Farmers - Managing the dry weather

Successful dry weather management is dependent on planning, monitoring and taking action. Being proactive and having a plan helps to reduce stress, as well as minimising the effect on this year's and next year's financial performance. Those farms who regularly experience dry conditions during the summer months should have a contingency plan in place, setting out key steps to take when the dry weather hits.

1. MONITOR THE SITUATION

During periods of dry weather close monitoring of the farm and wider environment is key.

- Perform weekly farm walk or measure at least 30% of your farm each week to assess pasture growth rates and feed available. This should include fields closed for silage which are grazable.
- Calculate animal demand in kgDM/ha and compare to pasture growth kgDM/ha.
- Prioritise livestock groups based on stock class, stage of lactation and body condition.

2. TAKE ACTION

A. Reduce demand per ha by:

- i. Selling barren or cull cows,
- ii. Selling in-spec finished animals or sell as stores.
- iii. Grazing silage fields
 1. Cut any fields above 4,000kgDM/ha to bring back into the grazing rotation.
 2. Graze fields where cover is below 4,000kgDM/ha with cows or yearling cattle.
- iv. Wean autumn calving cows early when calves are minimum 160 days old.

B. Maintain target rotation length:

- i. **Productive rye grass and clover swords** - 25 day rotation length. Graze 4% of your farm per day.
- ii. **Herbal ley/predominantly clover mixes/permanent pasture** - 33 day rotation length. Graze 3% of your farm per day.

C. Add in supplements to make up for any shortfall in feed.

3. SUPPLEMENTS – WHEN TO FEED?

“It is more important to maximise income post drought than minimise costs during a drought”.

- A. Aim to maintain average farm cover (AFC) at a minimum of 1,800kgDM/ha, this will ensure a quick response when rain arrives.
- B. Consider what supplements you have on farm. Assess the quantity and quality of each.
- C. Calculate animal requirements. Lactating cows need a high-quality feed but growing cattle or dry cows can be fed on an average quality feed.
- D. If you need to purchase supplements, do this early before stocks get short and prices increase!

Working out supplements required per day

Example: 45 yearlings at 450kg, grazing 10ha.

1. Daily area allocation (ha/day)

Grazing area (10ha) * % to graze per day (4%) = Daily area allocation (0.4 ha / day)

2. Feed available and feed demand (Total kgDM/day)

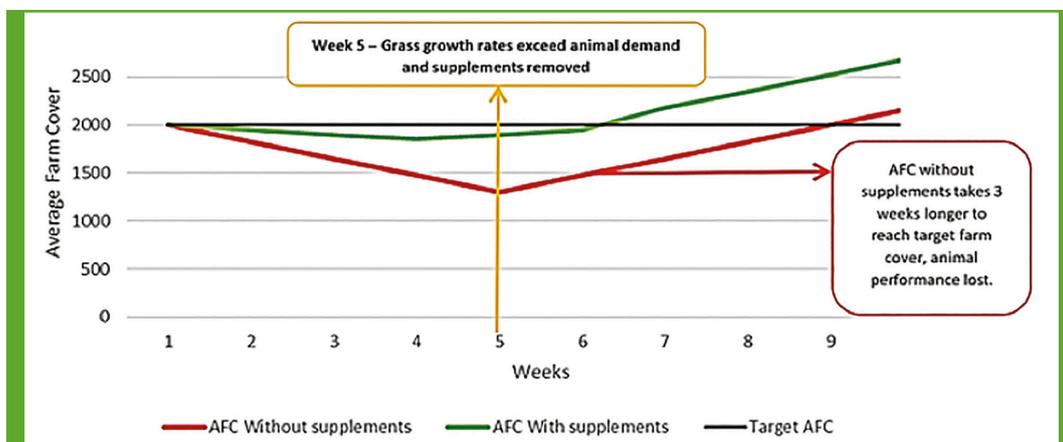
- Pre grazing cover (e.g. 2,500 kgDM/ha) – Post grazing cover (e.g. 1,500 kgDM/ha) = Grass available (1,000 kgDM/ha)
- Grass available (1,000 kgDM/ha) * Paddock area (0.4ha) = Total grass available (400 kgDM)
- Herd number (45) * Daily intake from grass¹ (11.25kgDM/hd) = Herd demand per day from grass (506 kgDM)

3. Supplements required per day (kgDM)

Herd demand per day (506kgDM) – Total grass available per day (400kgDM) = **106 kgDM of supplements required per day.**

¹ Liveweight (450 kg) * Demand as a % of body weight (2.5% BW) = Daily intake from grass per head (11.25 kgDM/hd)

Importance of protecting average farm cover (AFC)



Fertiliser

Nitrogen (N) fertiliser needs moisture to be taken up by the plant therefore assess soil moisture and grass growth rates.

- Half rate fertiliser could be applied where grass is still growing/transpiring (not dying back).
- Wait for rain and don't play catch up – just make timely applications of the correct amount.
- Use a compound fertiliser if possible (NPK/NK) to increase N uptake.

Overview of actions to take in dry weather

Average Farm Cover < 1,500 kgDM/ha	Take stock off the grazing platform and feed 100% forage until grass growth rates exceed demand.
Average Farm Cover 1,500 – 1,800 kgDM/ha	Calculate feed deficit (calculation above) and fill gap with supplements at grass. Move stock every 1-4 days to increase utilisation.
Average Farm Cover 1,800 – 2,300 kgDM/ha	Monitor growth against demand. If feed deficit exceeds 10 kgDM/day, add supplements into the system to maintain AFC.