

Newsletter 48

14 August 2011

Updates

The calf rearing faults I've seen on some farms and the questions I've been asked recently about calf rearing problems, made me drop replying to emails today and look at the Calf Rearing chapter in Dairying, and add bits and write more firmly. 122 members have read the Calf chapter which means that, allowing for non-dairy farmers, about 200 dairy farmers have not read it. Calf rearing can be easy or a nightmare. Like everything else in farming, learning is the solution.

Silage and Hay - only small details added.

Calcium changes refer to Ca levels being too low so will cause ryegrass pulling, Facial Eczema and low pasture intake by cattle and sheep this coming summer because of thatch and mould.

If your ryegrass pasture mineral analysis is much below the optimum of 0.8% Ca, (see the Pasture Mineral Analysis for other grasses' optimum calcium levels), apply adequate lime (usually AT LEAST 3,000 kg per hectare), plus other deficient elements such as serpentine for magnesium and trace elements based on a pasture analysis. Do it as soon as possible, because your newly calved cows and ewes* need calcium NOW for milk and for their offspring need calcium NOW to grow.

Remember that the difference between successful and unsuccessful farmers is only one week.

Lime releases locked up phosphates which is sitting under most soils in large quantities, so pasture analysis P levels often continue to rise after liming.

*For sheep farmers too.

Toppings (I never topped) and dead grass at the base of pastures are a source of nutrients for Facial Eczema spores, fusarium and other fungi. Fusarium are free living and produce zearalenone which is a phyto-oestrogen ergovaline which adversely affects fertility. If deficient, adequate LimeMag and deficient trace elements applied several months before summer will reduce it.

Accuracy

For yourself and the fertility inspector, use the Lime Nutrient Planner spreadsheet, or Fertiliser Nutrient Planner when P is low. They both show how much of the 11 elements to apply per hectare.

Those who have applied adequate LimeMag and trace elements are finding that the pasture grows so much better, that less or no nitrogen is needed, weeds get swamped out, earthworms increase and eat the weed seeds on the soil surface, reducing the weed population, so pasture and animal production increase, and Facial Eczema can be like ours - none from 1958 to 1987. See Calcium and a new chapter called Calcium Successes that I hope to finish soon.

Feed Budgeting

Good pasture growth in one season usually means less growth in the next, because more nutrients have been used up, so analyse your ryegrass or other grass tissue and use the Fertiliser or Lime Nutrient Planners to plan what to apply. Doing this has achieved healthy soils, excellent fast growing pasture and young stock.

Also use the Dairy or Beef Feed Budget spreadsheet to warn you a month or more before the pasture deficiency occurs.

Running out of pasture in spring is a costly mistake that about half the dairy farmers make. It is more profitable to apply the deficient fertiliser elements now, than to buy supplements later.