



MAXIMISE BUTTERFATS THIS SUMMER TO BOOST MILK VALUE AND INCOME

Maintaining butterfat levels during the grazing season is one of the main challenges facing milk producers at this time of the year. It is a particular issue for spring calving herds, where cows are also hitting peak yield and need to retain sufficient condition for good fertility.

“Over the recent years I have seen this also with crossbred cows who typically produce milk with a higher butterfat content when grazing” adds Nigel Condell Ruminant Nutritionist, Specialist Nutrition.

“These cows are facing high energy demands like those higher-yielding Holstein types, where butterfat levels for those crossbred cows are often in excess of 4.5%cow/day. Plus, it is an important time for maintaining body fat reserves prior to breeding.”

Balancing Energy Supply

Supplying the right amount and type of energy to the cow, irrespective of breed or type is therefore critical if butterfat production is to be supported without adversely affecting milk yields, body condition or fertility.

“Grazed grass can be low in fibre with high sugar and oil contents,” Nigel explains. “And for modern ryegrass swards this can persist right through until late summer, not just during spring when most expect it.

“Unless properly balanced in the rumen, the rapidly fermentable carbohydrates, together with the higher oil content, can have a negative impact on rumen function and fibre digestion, resulting in depressed butterfat production.”

Stabilising rumen pH

Achieving the correct energy release in the rumen is particularly important. This helps limit any rumen pH drop, and so promotes fibre digestion and the production of key milk fat key precursors, such as the volatile fatty acid acetate.

“Aim to keep rumen pH as stable as possible, and to minimise the time spent below pH 5.8 when fibre digestion is compromised,” Nigel advises.



“Start by ensuring an adequate forage-to-concentrate ratio in the overall diet, and make sure any buffer feed contains sufficient long fibre to stimulate cudging – to release acid-neutralising saliva – and good rumen function.”

Hay or big bale silage are ideal, recommends Nigel, with chopped straw a good alternative if these are not available.

Correct concentrate choice

“In addition, make sure a good proportion of the energy supplied by concentrates comes from feeds containing digestible fibre. Dry feed options include sugar beet feed and soya hulls, along with many of the moist feeds, and this will help both maintain rumen pH and boost the supply of milk fat pre-cursors.

“If only feeding compound in the parlour, switch to a concentrate based on digestible fibre rather than starch, and feed ‘little and often’ to avoid overloading the rumen. And always make sure concentrates are high quality with good palatability to encourage full intake alongside grazed grass,” he adds.

Nigel also highlights the value of using of a slow-release rumen conditioner like AcidBuf or a metabolically active yeast, such as Vistacell. Both act to reduce the rate and extent of any rumen pH drop, and so minimise the negative impact on rumen fermentation.

Increased butterfat production

In a recent trial, addition of a slow-release conditioner and an active live yeast to cows receiving a 65:35 forage-to-concentrate ratio diet increased both milk fat production (1649 g/cow/day vs. 1462 g/cow/day) and fat-corrected milk yield (38.9kg/cow/day vs. 37.1kg/cow/day). The result was due to a substantial reduction in the time the rumen spent at low pH (see Figure 1), which improved fibre fermentation and produced a significant rise in the acetate concentration in the rumen (63.1% vs. 61.9%).

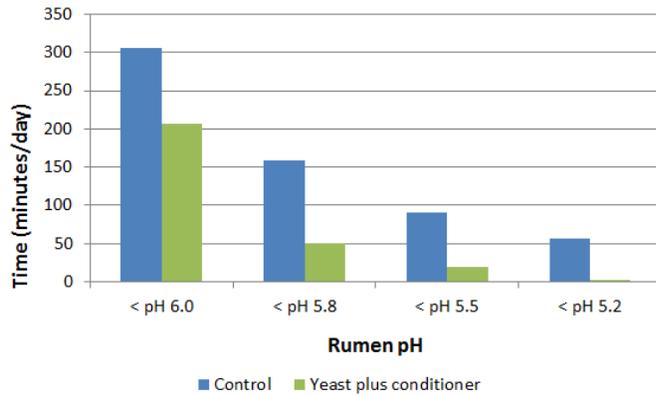


Figure 1 – Effect on rumen pH (Source: Schothorst Feed Research, 2014)

“These results show how important it is to properly support rumen fermentation if butterfat production is to be maintained when grazing,” Nigel concludes.

“It doesn’t matter whether that’s achieved through changing the diet, adding a rumen conditioner or live yeast, or all three. The overall improvement in butterfat percentage, and subsequent milk value and profitability, can be substantial.”

Would you like to chat?

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