

## **INVEST NOW, OR PAY LATER**

Beef and sheep producers are being urged to maximise cattle and lamb growth rates at grass this summer to avoid the consequences of another expensive feed winter.

“If the dry conditions persist, many livestock farmers will be struggling with grass and conserved forage shortages. Supplementary feeding now may be the last thing on farmers’ minds during the usual peak grass growing season, but failure to keep stock growing over a dry summer grazing period inevitably means costly penalties later in the year,” warns David Thornton from Rumenco.

He points out that if cattle are housed lighter in the autumn they will take extra days to finish. Sheep producers, too, do not want lambs hanging around consuming grass that has been earmarked for flushing ewes. “These extra finishing days really cost you over the longer-term; in expensive bought-in winter feed, additional bedding straw and a higher fixed cost burden in terms of electricity and diesel costs.”

With the cereal and oilseed markets both looking bullish over the summer, feed prices are only likely to go up. Consequently, producers must act now to make the most of what cheap grass is available to mitigate the costly impact of a rising feed market late in the season.

David Thornton points out that in a good grass growing year, cattle that are not fed any supplementary feed at grass typically return overall summer liveweight gains of 0.5-0.6kg/day. But, significantly, he says, their subsequent winter silage and concentrate requirements will be higher than for cattle that have received some supplementation. “This is because the animals are older and the efficiency with which they are able to convert feed into growth has been reduced,” he explains.

To ensure beef cattle and finishing lambs are able to make the most of what grass is available, Rumenco recommends introducing feed blocks to ensure maximum growth rates.

“Trials with Rumevite blocks fed at grass from June through to housing and no concentrates confirm that beef cattle will put on an extra 0.24kg/day compared with grass alone. Similarly, in studies with finishing lambs, Rumevite produced gains of 189g/day versus 94g/day for controls with the block-fed lambs finishing in 42 days compared with 82 days for the controls.

“Feed block supplementation also has additional benefits over trough feeding in that intake is determined by grass quality – the lower the grass quality the higher the intake and vice versa. Blocks provide a useful indicator of grass value, a kind of nutritional barometer if you like, so their daily cost is therefore proportional to the grass value, whereas hand feeding systems are more static, irrespective of grass quality,” he points out.

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*Maximise weight gains at grass this summer or pay later during what will undoubtedly be another expensive feeding winter.*

Date: 25 May 2011

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