



FACT SHEET

MARCH 2013

NUTRITION OF THE BEEF COW POST-WEANING (THROUGH TO 4-6 WEEKS PRE-CALVING)

The management strategy for a beef cow-breeding herd is determined by a balance of feed supply patterns, competing resources and market requirements.

BENEFITS OF GRAZING BEEF COWS

There are major benefits from running beef cows on hill country farms because their flexible feed demand can be aligned with the seasonal pasture growth curve.

An additional benefit is their ability to assist in the management of pasture quality. In this respect, they play an important role on kikuyu pasture in Northland and brown-top dominant swards elsewhere.

FEEDING PRIORITY

Weaning beef calves normally occurs at five to seven months of age. It can be carried out successfully at four months (this can be an appropriate drought management strategy) provided appropriate provision is made for post-weaning feed for the calf.

In the beef cow calendar this leaves five months of the year that beef cows are low priority stock. They can function as 'work horses', eating rank pasture and controlling shrub regrowth provided they were in good condition at weaning.

During this time, priority can be given to other classes of livestock. Cows become one of the few groups available that can be restricted in the interests of pasture development and utilisation.

ADVANTAGES OF RESTRICTING INTAKES DURING WINTER

There is a major justification for maintaining a breeding cow herd on hill country. Not only has it significant advantages for the farm as a whole, but it has been shown to be beneficial for the cows to lose around 10% of their liveweight in the post-weaning period.

Cows losing that magnitude of liveweight have increased longevity and suffer no reduction in performance—provided their nutritional requirements are met in the pre- and post-calving periods, and lost liveweight is regained.

COW FEED EFFICIENCY

Some farmers rotationally graze their cows behind the ewes in a winter rotation during this period. In such situations, cow intakes are very low e.g. Angus cows can eat as little as 3-3.5kg DM/day. This highlights the feed conversion efficiency and supports the concept that an efficiently managed beef cow could have a true winter stock unit rating of 3.5 stock units compared to the commonly accepted value of 6 to 7.

Minimising cow feed requirements during maintenance periods can have a significant impact on overall feed efficiency—and therefore profitability—on a hill country sheep and cattle farm. This should be a consideration when establishing appropriate stock unit equivalents for feed budgeting.

MANAGING COW CONDITION PRIOR TO CALVING

Cows greater than condition score (CS) 3.5 out of 5 (7 on 1 to 10 scale) at calving are more prone to calving difficulties and to metabolic disease. A reduced intake around calving should not be carried out too rapidly with fat cows. This can result in hypomagnesaemia if subjected to sudden severe intake restrictions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fact sheet has been created from the Profitable Farming of Beef Cows book 2009 [Editors: Steve Morris and Duncan Smeaton].

Find out more about feeding beef cows from the following publications:

- Guide to NZ Cattle Farming
- Condition scoring for beef cows factsheet

MORE INFORMATION

For copies of any of these documents, contact Beef + Lamb New Zealand: email resources@beeflambnz.com, freephone 0800 BEEFLAMB (0800 233 352) or visit www.beeflambnz.com.



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