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MAXIMISING THE PERFORMANCE OF CATTLE AND SHEEP AT GRASS

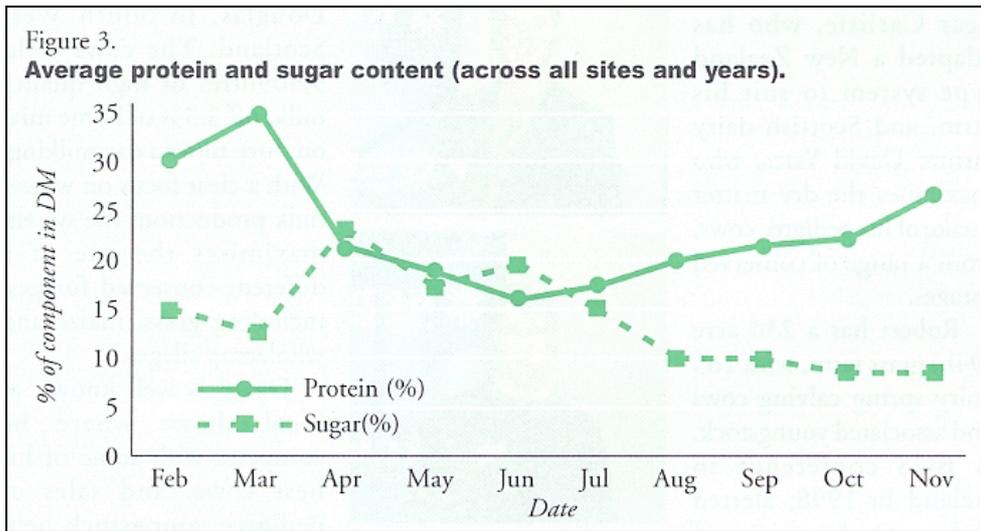
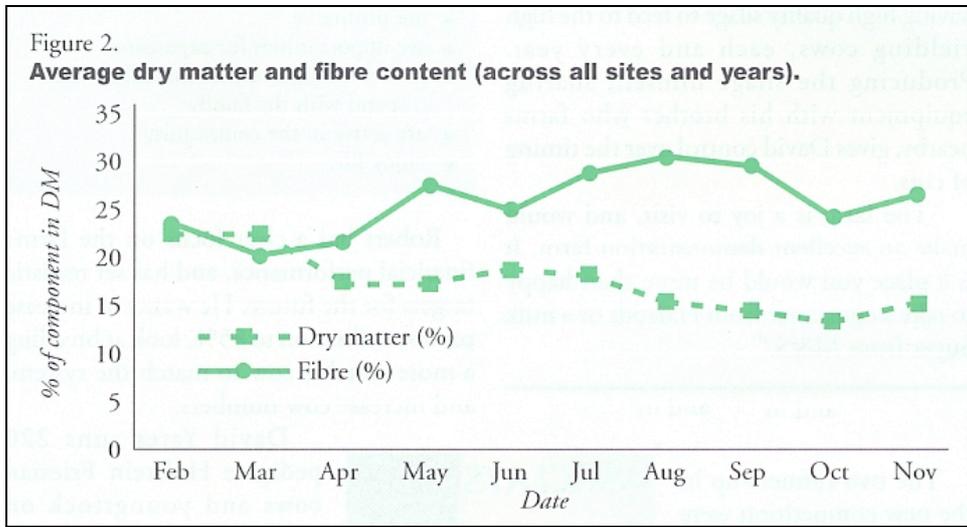
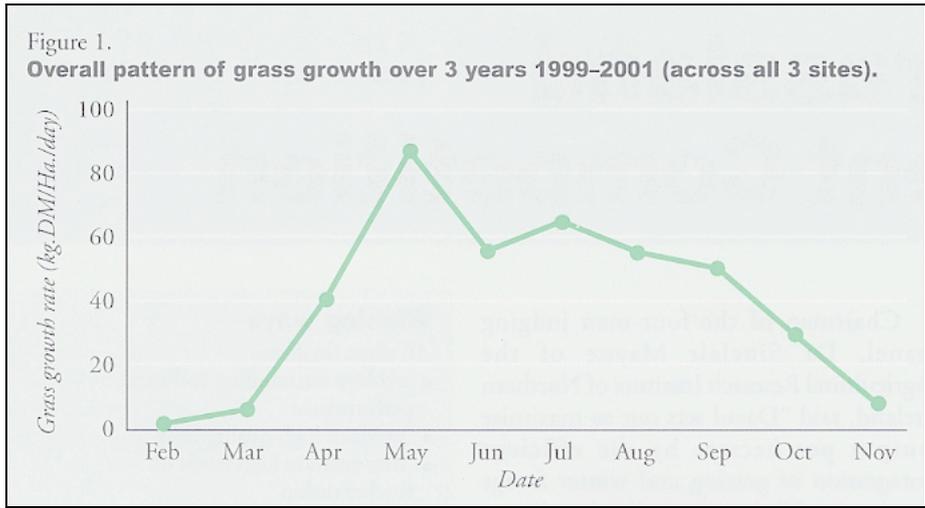
It pays to stock summer pastures heavily in early summer, but even in good grass growing years the growth rates of cattle and lambs decline as the season progresses. David Thornton from Rumenco explains why supplementary feed from mid-summer is technically and economically justified.

Early in the season when conditions are favourable for grass growth, it's pretty easy to achieve above average daily liveweight gains for your cattle and lambs. But if the dry spring weather conditions persist into June, grass growth and digestibility will be severely compromised.

Whatever the weather, the quantity and quality of grass slowly diminish over the summer growing season. For optimum animal performance, the grass needs to be young and digestible. Good gains in cattle and lambs from early season grass alone are achieved because it is very nutritious. Typically, grass in June might contain 20-24% protein (in the dry matter) and is usually around 80 D-value, giving a ME value of 12.8MJ/kg DM – which are values higher than in many compound feeds used at this time!

The graphs below show how the various nutritional parameters vary over the summer (see figures 1, 2 and 3 below). Consequently, the management of grazing livestock has to be adjusted accordingly. High stocking rates early in the season have to be reduced later on as accumulation of grass dry matter per hectare reduces. Likewise, digestibility, protein level and sugar contents also tend to decrease, whilst dry matter and fibre contents increase. And in a drought year, the process is accelerated. So much so, that you can find your animals actually losing weight. The take home message is that your grass slowly loses its value after June unless an appropriate grazing supplement, such as Rumevite, is introduced to help stock make the most of your cheapest feed.

There's a good economic argument for supplementary feeding too. In a good growing year, cattle that have not been fed any supplementary feed at grass typically return overall summer gains of 0.5-0.6kg/day. But, importantly, 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.



Profit from Rumevite at grass

Our own studies using Rumevite blocks at grass and no concentrates have indicated 0.24kg/day extra gain with blocks over controls, where blocks were fed to beef store cattle and dairy young stock from June to housing. Similarly, with finishing lambs,

Rumevite produced gains of 189g/day versus 94g/day for controls with the Rumevite-fed lambs finishing in 45 days compared with 82 days for the controls.

[Picture: cattle on Rumevite at grass]

Additional benefits

Rumevite 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.

Rumevite also provides essential minerals and vitamins, which help to boost fertility. Mineral deficiencies cause many costly reproductive problems.

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David Thornton has been with Rumenco for 30 years. He is a respected nutritionist and has helped many beef, dairy and sheep producers maximise the value of home grown forages through cost-effective supplementary feeding of Rumevite feedblocks, Supalyx and Lifeline buckets and the wider range of Rumenco feed products.

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