



## **LIFELINE PROVES ITS WORTH IN POOR SILAGE YEAR**

In a year like this, when the feed value of silage is poor, effective and judicious use of supplementary nutrition is crucial for maintaining the condition of cows and ewes pre-parturition.

At Major David Walter's Balthayock Farm on the outskirts of Perth, Rumenco Lifeline supplements have been used for the last three to four years with great success. "This year our silage has the equivalent feed value of straw so we needed Lifeline to save our bacon," he said.

A pedigree Charolais herd was established at Balthayock in 1969 and now there are 79 pedigree cows and in-calf heifers. There is also a commercial suckler herd of 160 Simmental cross cows and a flock of 1100 breeding ewes. Most of the 650ha farm is down to grass, but there are also 47ha of winter barley, 7.5ha spring barley and 8ha oats, which are all retained for home use.

Looking over the productive Carse of Gowrie, Balthayock sits on the side of a steep hill with the majority of the land lying between 350 and 750 feet, although it rises to 900 feet and is all classified LFA.

For the last four years Lleyn ewes have been introduced into the sheep flock. "They are terrific mothers, very prolific and because they are smaller, we can carry more per hectare. The downside is that the lambs are smaller, but they produce higher numbers so overall we are better off."

He said that following last year's miserable summer, even though he had to sell store lambs for the first time to preserve grass for the ewes, the sheep are in poorer condition than usual before lambing and this is where Lifeline Lamb and Ewe comes into its own. "It provides vital trace elements, minerals and most importantly, energy, to the ewe at a critical time. It also boosts ewe colostrum quality."

An enthusiast of the British Charolais Cattle Society's Breedplan, Major Walter scrutinises genetics and figures for ease of calving in his herd and will not tolerate a bull or cow that does not have good calving figures. Home-bred Charolais bulls are used as terminal sires on the Simmental cross cows with a Simmental bull used for breeding replacements.

The commercial herd is spring calving and Lifeline Pre-calver buckets have been available to the cows since they came inside for the winter. "I believe the combination of good genetics and feeding is the answer to problems at calving. Lifeline is very palatable, the stock love it and it has an important part to play in the health of both cows and calves," said Major Walter.



Heifer calves are sold store at Stirling in April, while bull calves are kept entire and sold to Scotbeef at 12 to 14 months at around 400kg deadweight. Major Walter said his system works well and utilises shed space and grass to the maximum, the only problem is that they are paid about £1/kg too little for the finished product.

“We are worse off than we were five years ago and the supermarkets must realise that production of beef from the suckler head is in great danger and that without another £1/kg at least on deadweight price, the decline of the national suckler herd is likely to continue.

“According to McKinsey’s report on Beef Production from the Suckler Herd in Northern Ireland, a suckler cow costs £800 a year to keep and the break-even price for a suckled calf is 460p/kg.”

Despite declining margins for producing cattle, Major Walter firmly believes that he cannot afford to save money on feed. “Lifeline is not cheap, but in a year like this we have to have it.”

In an effort to reduce costs, he has changed the farm policy at Balthayock to make the most of forage by using both white and red clover varieties to boost production and cut fertiliser bills. Grass is down for an average of seven years, but in between, red clover and ryegrass are direct drilled to keep production levels high. “Before introducing the clover mix, we used well over 100 tonnes of nitrogen fertiliser a year, this year we have only ordered 35 tonnes.”

He admitted this was offset slightly by spending around £7,500 on grass seed, but said he was still better off by quite a margin and grass production has improved which is important as forage forms the base of the livestock diet.

Even on a high quality forage diet, the extra boost that Lifeline provides through its unique blend of ingredients is important to the well-being of breeding stock, but this year with silage quality poor, supplementing the diet of pregnant females is absolutely vital.