

LOW DM GRASS HITS CATTLE GROWTH RATES

Grazing conditions have been dire in many parts of the country because of the unprecedented heavy summer rainfall, but cattle growth rates are also being compromised because livestock are struggling to ingest enough forage dry matter.

“Grass is the cheapest feed on the farm at around 1p/kg DM, so it’s well worth making the most of it. But this year many grazing pastures are so wet that growing cattle are simply not getting enough nutrition from the forage on offer. And with poaching so widespread too, many enterprises have been struggling to cope with the saturated underfoot conditions,” reports David Thornton from Rumenco.

Many cattle producers will now be thinking about supplementary feeding, but concentrates will not be the best option for a number of reasons, he argues.

“Even small amounts of concentrates can cause substitution of what grass DM is available, simply because the rumen bugs needed to ferment either pasture fibre or starch from concentrates are quite different. The rumen can go out of synchrony and the result is expensive and disappointing performance. And this year, we also have the problem that the ground is far too soft to feed cake on the ground anyway,” David Thornton points out.

Rumenco says feed block enquiries are running at record levels for the time of the year, but this is not surprising.

“A lot of trial work has been done to look at feeding blocks to cattle with grass over the summer grazing period. The benefits are now well documented and include an improved mean liveweight gain of 0.24kg per day over grazing alone.

“The blocks also help suckler producers, in particular, make the most of the available grass and boost weaning weights, as well as offering easy-feed convenience.”

Mr Thornton adds that block consumption closely matches grass availability and this ensures less performance variation between cattle. And this makes it easier for producers to sell even batches of weaned calves.

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Note to editors

1. Rumenco is a market leader in the ruminant feed supplement market. It is a successful company with strong brands. The well-established Rumevite, Supalyx and Lifeline products, in particular, are trusted and valued by livestock farmers in the UK. The company has forged robust partnership relationships with the agricultural merchant trade based on its branded products and contract manufacture.

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