

# RUMENCO



## **INNOVATIVE FEEDING APPROACH PAYS OFF FOR SHROPSHIRE BEEF AND SHEEP PRODUCERS**



**An innovative pre-birth ruminant feeding approach based uniquely on feeding both the dam and unborn offspring through a single supplement is paying off handsomely for Shropshire beef and sheep producers the Morgan family.**

The Morgans run a suckler herd of 75 Simmentals and 600 breeding ewes at Marlbrook Hall Farm, Elton near Ludlow. Over the last four years, the family has focused bought-in supplementary feeding exclusively on improving dam colostrum quality, as well as cow and ewe vitamin and mineral status with impressive results.

“Fertility levels have improved significantly in our suckler herd and calving spread has been cut by 10 days. Calf health and vigour are also much better,” comments Andrew Morgan, who primarily looks after the cows. “My brother Hugh reports similar benefits in the sheep flock. Lambing is definitely easier with lambs thriving well immediately after they are born.”

The feeding strategy has allowed the Morgans to cut purchased feed costs to an absolute minimum. Other than grass silage and minimal grazing before calving in February, the only supplementation the cattle receive is the Rumenco Lifeline Pre-Calver product introduced five to six weeks before calving.

“For the cattle our only supplement is Lifeline, apart from feeding additional magnesium to help prevent grass staggers in the spring. It contains a blend of nutritional boosters along with a potent mineral and vitamin pack to optimise immunity in the calf and improve the calving process,” Andrew says.

“Since we introduced it there has been a noticeable improvement in ease of calving. Calves are also much more vigorous at birth and are usually up and sucking within six hours. We’ve also seen a gradual improvement in cow fertility. We used to use an awful lot of minerals, but have been able to phase these out over the last couple of years because Lifeline is really sorting out cow condition.”

Around 90% of the herd calves in February and March and last year only one of the 75 cows returned to service. It’s this improvement in fertility that has helped reduce calving spread so significantly.

According to Charlie Prince from supplier Masstock, Lifeline is the only pre-calving product formulated for both the cow and unborn calf. A version is also available for sheep.

“The supplement includes high levels of selenium and vitamin E to ensure the newborn calf gets the best possible start, whilst birthing problems are minimised for the mother. Cows are quick to give birth with less incidence of retained placenta, and body reserves are maximised to promote good conception in early lactation. Calves are quick to stand and show a strong desire to suckle,” he says.

Charlie adds that the supplement also helps optimise calf immunity by boosting colostrum quality and absorption. “Immuno-protein production and antibody levels in the colostrum and increased by incorporating mannan oligosaccharides. These also increase colostrum absorption by the calf, which improves health and vitality.”

Andrew Morgan believes the innovative supplementary feeding approach has transformed the nutrition of the cows and ewes on the farm. “It just works and what we really like is that the system is so simple and cost-effective, and maximises the use of what home-grown feeds we have available.”

Cows go to a Limousin bull, with the heifers sired by a Simmental. Around 10 heifers are kept back each year for replacements with the rest sold locally through Ludlow livestock market. A new initiative is currently being evaluated to sell some of the beef and lamb privately to capitalise on their excellent carcass quality and ability to demonstrate full traceability based only on feeds grown on the farm. Animals are finished at 16-18 months on a barley/protein home mix.

The pre-birth feeding system has also been extended to the sheep flock run by Andrew’s brother Hugh. Lifeline Lamb and Ewe – which incorporates the same nutritional principles as the Pre-Calver supplement – is introduced to the ewe ration pre-lambing, but in a 40% protein concentrate form mixed with whole cereals.

“We introduce the pre-lambing mix around six weeks before lambing to the scanned ewes. The far out ewes start on hay, but then depending on weather conditions move onto a mix of quality haylage and hay closer to lambing. The twin-rearing Texels receive up to 0.7kg a day of the mix and those carrying triplets up to 0.9kg a day. Single bearing ewes are fed haylage and Rumevite Sheep Super Energy blocks,” Hugh says.

“The Lifeline has a similar effect on the ewes as it does with the cows. Lambing is definitely easier and lambs are born strong and healthy. And we’ve saved a lot of time by not having to nurse lambs and helping them to start sucking.”