

1-40 Deferred grazing

Deferred grazing is the practice of holding over pasture that has been considered surplus to animal requirements in spring. It is then grazed at a later date when a shortage of pasture occurs, this is usually in the summer/autumn.

Aim

- Matching feed supply to herd requirements using a low cost method of pasture conservation.
- Reduce farm costs.
Traditional hay/silage conservation systems account for about 18% of total farm operating expenditure.
- Increase profitability.
Deferred grazing can be used either to reduce the amount of silage/hay made on the farm or as part of a nil conservation system. Nil conservation, including deferred grazing, was compared with a traditional conservation system on the Taranaki Agricultural Research Farm at 3.7 cows/ha. The nil conservation system produced similar milkfat, but more protein per hectare. The extra income and reduced costs resulted in an increase in profit of \$360/ha.
- Pasture renovation.
Deferred grazing can allow pasture reseeding; this results in significant increases in ryegrass population. No increase in other grasses, weeds, or clover component of the pasture should occur. Pastures which have reseeded produce an extra 15% in the year following deferring.

Taking Surplus

- Paddocks should be removed from the rotation as surplus appears. For reseeding to occur they must be removed during the ryegrass reproductive phase, which is mid October - mid November.
- Because of the renovation effect, poorer ryegrass white clover pastures are ideal to use.
- To allow cows to be fed to requirements during December, early January, the proportion of the farm designated for reseeding, at a moderately high stocking rate, should not exceed 10%.

Grazing

- Think of deferred pasture as a supplement.
- Strip graze between morning and night milkings. *Offer the cows 10 kgDM/cow/day, or 1/250 of the farm per day. Aim for 50% utilisation.*
- Milk production will decline in the first 2-3 days as the cows get used to the deferred pastures.
- Mowing deferred pasture before grazing will have no effect on either milk production, or seedling establishment.
- To maximise animal production, deferred pasture should be fed during a period of feed shortage - graze before reseeding occurs if need be.
- For reseeding to occur, deferred pasture should not be grazed until the seed is mature. This is when seed is readily shed from the seed head, generally mid January.
- Grazing late February, early March results in both good seedling establishment and allows breakdown of dead material before winter.

Effect on pest and disease - results from TARS

- Grass grub populations are similar in deferred and rotationally grazed pasture.
- Porina populations are not affected if deferred pasture is grazed before the end of March. Pastures grazed after this may have more Porina than rotationally grazed pastures.
- Facial Eczema spore counts are no higher on deferred grazing paddocks compared with the rest of the farm. Monitoring of spores is recommended if conditions are ideal for Facial Eczema spore growth (see *FarmFacts 3-6 and 3-7*).

Deferred grazing is a cheap and flexible form of pasture conservation. Feeding off the deferred pasture during a feed deficit will mean cows are better feed throughout summer and autumn. Allowing 10% of the farm to reseed on an annual basis will result in a stronger ryegrass component of the pasture. This will result in increased pasture production, provided the pasture is managed to achieve good seedling establishment.