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Don't neglect those dry cows

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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sively build up stock numbers, keeping accurate records of return per acre as he does so.

There is no doubt that on many farms in the South-West, understocking—at least during the flush—has encouraged undesirable species including capeweed, Yorkshire fog, and many early maturing annual grasses. Hard grazing, on the other hand, can reduce these weeds, with consequent encouragement of subterranean clover, provided there are sufficient plants present early in the season to give a cover. Of course it is not only severity of grazing which is important, and it pays to keep a close watch on the various paddocks on the property and have sufficient flexibility to graze a paddock as soon as some undesirable species becomes too dominant.

Further control can be achieved by grazing or mowing, timed to reduce seeding of undesirable species. This is in keeping with the general recommendation to cut weedy paddocks for silage, and paddocks with better species for hay a few weeks later. Most of the undesirable species are early flowering, and these practices prevent them from setting much seed.

Renovation

There are many cases of deteriorated pasture where it is essential to plough and resow with desirable species in order to bring the pasture back to satisfactory production. Such cases would include those where Guildford grass has become dominant, and many of those where unproductive annual weeds are so dense as to give too much competition to the better species being introduced. In other cases closer attention to grazing management, together perhaps with summer cultivation and reseeding, will do much to rejuvenate pastures, provided no serious mineral deficiency is present.

The lower South-West has a much greater potential productivity per acre than is now being obtained. Increasing the stocking rate, after making adequate provision for fodder conservation, could reduce weeds and increase productivity.

DON'T NEGLECT THOSE DRY COWS

When a dairy cow becomes pregnant she is normally milking and has some months to go before being dried off. It is usual at this stage for dairy farmers to provide the best feed available.

While the cows are returning profit management is at a high standard, and the cow requires no special treatment apart from that normally provided.

A cow should be allowed not less than a six-week dry period before calving again. Except in the case of an odd high producing cow, the dry period is usually longer than this. Grade Herd Recording records show that cows in the wholermilk zone have the longest lactations, their average length of lactation being 8.4 months. Those cows under test in the predominantly butterfat area have an average lactation of 7.3 months.

Four Month Dry Period

Throughout the dairying areas the average dry period for a cow is just over four months. Unfortunately in many cases this is a time when many dairy farmers turn their cows out onto poor pasture and neglect them.

Just before calving it is essential for the dairy cow to be on a high level of nutrition to enable certain biological functions to be completed satisfactorily before calving. Adequate nutrition is necessary to enable the cow to maintain her own bodily condition. On no account should this be permitted to deteriorate after the completion of her lactation.

Secondly, the in-calf cow must be fed well enough to enable her to grow a calf and to prepare the mammary tissues for the succeeding lactation.

A restricted food supply may cause the partial suspension of these essential functions. Nature has a system of priorities in making adjustments for this. On a limited
feed supply the cow will firstly maintain her own bodily condition, then her growing calf, and finally adjustments will be made in the mammary mechanism. A cow will remain alive and develop a calf on a very low nutritional level, but the milk supply will suffer considerably.

**“Steaming up”**

From about six weeks before calving, a cow should be “steamed up” so that she is in rising condition. By this method the dairy farmer is assured of the delivery of a healthy calf and the milk supply of the cow will be limited only by her inherited potential. Fat will not be laid on the cow until after all of the essentials previously mentioned have been satisfied.

Bodily condition before and at calving has an important influence on the subsequent yield of a dairy cow, as well as the health of the calf. A cow in good condition at calving will yield 25 per cent more milk than if she is in poor condition.

This is not a temporary flush, but is maintained throughout the lactation. The butterfat content of the milk of a cow calving in good condition will generally be higher too.

A cow calving in fat condition will generally “milk off” its excess condition. Such cows will usually maintain higher than average butterfat tests whilst they are in heavy condition and the butterfat tests of their milk will fall as their condition is reduced to normal. Only in cases when a cow is in excessively fat condition is there undue danger of calving difficulties.

It is important that a dairy cow in calf should be maintained in good condition at the completion of her lactation, and if possible she should be in rising condition just before calving, without becoming overfat.

Cows near the end of pregnancy should be given adequate water and they should be run on pasture which is equal to that provided for the milking herd. This will ensure that they are in satisfactory condition for the succeeding lactation.

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