

The impact of your feeding decisions during a fodder shortage



There are many things you may decide to do to get through a fodder shortage. Be sure that you have considered the implications.

Class of stock and their feed requirements	You may decide to...	Consider the implications
Calves and heifers		
<p><i>Weaning to 12 months:</i> Depending on size, this group needs 40–80 MJ ME, 15–17% CP</p> <p>12 months to calving: Depending on size, this group needs 80–100 MJ ME, 13–15% CP</p> 	<p>Go for free choice palm kernel extract (PKE) meal and keep the grain/concentrate up to them.</p> <p>Accept a lower growth rate just for this year, assuming they will compensate down the track.</p> <p>Rear a smaller number of better quality animals.</p>	<p>This diet is likely to be nutritionally unbalanced and too low in effective fibre for healthy rumen function unless long fibre sources are also fed.</p> <p>Smaller heifers will produce less milk this year and in years to come. They are also far less likely to get back in calf in their first lactation, and be therefore more likely to be culled.</p> <p>This may have big financial implications for several years as these animals move through the milking herd.</p>
Bulls		
<p>(700 kg, no liveweight change) This group needs about 80 MJ ME, 12% CP</p> 	<p>Worry about them later.</p> <p>Reduce your bull numbers to save on feed and use more AI strategically for replacements.</p>	<p>Don't forget these guys. More empty cows are likely if the bulls aren't kept in good body condition.</p>
Dry Cows		
<p>(550 kg, no liveweight change) This group needs about 90–100 MJ ME, 11–12% CP</p> 	<p>Feed them a little less than you normally would and allow them to strip off some body condition before calving.</p> <p>Not worry too much about their transition feeding management in the 3 weeks before calving.</p>	<p>You need to feed 35 megajoules ME to put on a kg of bodyweight, but you only get 28 megajoules back when the cow mobilises it. That's like paying a 25% 'interest rate'.</p> <p>Cows in poorer body condition at calving will have low body reserves and take longer to get back into positive nutrient balance.</p> <p>These cows will be at increased risk of metabolic problems (e.g. milk fever, ketosis) and mastitis, produce less milk and have poorer in-calf rates, at a time when optimal health, milk production and fertility are essential for drought recovery</p> <p>Poor transition management will result in even greater metabolic problems in fresh/ early lactation cows, higher risk of acidosis and abomasal displacements, and even greater impacts on milk production and fertility.</p>

Class of stock and their feed requirements

You may decide to...

Consider the implications

Milkers

Cows in early lactation

(550 kg, 30L, 3.8%F, 3.2%P, -0.2kg per day)

This group needs about 220 MJ ME*, 16–18% CP



Increase energy intake of early lactation cows by offering more grain/concentrate in the dairy.

Use silage supplies to feed this group.

Place cows in a sacrifice paddock to feed grain/concentrates and other supplements, in order to slow the paddock rotation and build a pasture feed wedge.

Put cows into paddocks before pasture has reached the 3-leaf stage.

Cows rumens may not be adapted to handle that much grain/concentrate, and the risk of acidosis will be increased. Smaller cows and first calvers are at greatest risk. Monitor these animals closely and ensure they have equal access to feed.

Effective fibre levels and total energy intakes may not be sufficient to maintain production and prevent body condition loss whilst the pasture feed wedge is being built. Ensure diet and daily feeding rate are adequate.

Pasture still at the 1–2 leaf stage will provide cows with less NDF and less effective fibre.

The pasture will take longer to recover from grazing and you'll grow less feed.

Cows in mid lactation

(550 kg, 25L, 4%F, 3.4%P, +0.1kg per day)

This group needs about 200 MJ ME*, 14–16% CP



Give cows sudden, unrestricted access to young, lush pastures or forage crops

Buy hay from other regions

Use high fibre by-products where the history of agchemical use is unknown.

Risk of nitrate poisoning. Avoid feeding high-risk plants to hungry cows. Delay feeding until plants are more mature. Dilute high-risk plants with hay or other low-nitrate forages.

Risk of introducing weeds to your property. Buy feeds from reliable sources and feed all hay out in one designated paddock if possible. Remove any weeds before they set seed.

Risk of chemical residues. Buy feeds with a Commodity Vendor Declaration. Introduce new feeds gradually. Feed in limited proportions of the diet e.g. < 20%

Cows in late lactation

(550 kg, 19L, 4.2%F, 3.6%P, +0.1 kg per day)

This group needs about 180 MJ ME*, 12–14% CP



Accept a lower body condition score target at dry-off.

Dry the cows off a bit early to save feed.

Milk production and in-calf rate will suffer next lactation unless body condition is made up during the dry period. The cow is more efficient at converting feed into body condition while she is still milking than when she is dry.

Drying cows off early will mean less milk income to pay for the feed they need.

MJ ME = megajoules of metabolisable energy. CP = crude protein.

* Additional energy may be required for walking activity and to cope with adverse weather conditions.

