



## PLANET DAIRY WILL HELP GET MOST FROM GRAZING



**Despite the wet start to 2021, thoughts will soon move to turning cows out and planning to maximise milk from grazing.**

Preparing the grazing platform for turnout, ensuring all water troughs are clean and filling correctly, checking all fences are in good condition and measuring grass growth and planning the grazing rotation are all key tasks at this time of year, helping ensure a good supply of high-quality grass.

Good management of covers will help keep grass above 12MJ whereas a poorly maintained sward will be closer to 11MJ. Assuming 13kgDM intake in the best grazing conditions, better quality grass can be worth an extra 11MJ/day, equivalent to an extra 2 litres/cow/day from grazing.

But it is important to remember that getting the most from grazing requires precise supplementation to balance the grass and maintain good rumen health. It does not mean turning cows out and stopping supplementary feeding altogether or feeding a low specification feed in the hope of saving costs. Reduced production and compromised fertility will soon mean margins are moving the wrong way. A high-quality grazing concentrate like our new no soya: no palm Planet Dairy range will help you optimise production from grazing.

### **Rumen efficiency**

To help maximise production from grass it is important to consider the rumen. Grazed grass contains plenty of chemical fibre but little physically effective fibre, meaning energy sources can pass through the rumen quickly. To improve rumen efficiency, Planet Dairy contains physically effective fibre sources such as sugar beet and beans to reduce passage rate through the rumen.

In addition, to help reduce the risk of poor rumen health and low rumen pH we can add a carefully selected range of rumen buffers to ensure your cows make the most effective use of grazed grass.

Another challenge when balancing grass is protein levels. Efficiency of protein use is particularly topical given the cost of protein sources and the environmental consequences of poor utilisation of nitrogen. To make sure your cows make full use of the available protein in grazed grass, all Planet Dairy products contain Novatan, a blend of essential oils which has a direct effect on protein digestion in the rumen.



Spring and well-managed grazing provides high quantities of rumen degradable protein. The nitrogen is converted to ammonia which the rumen microbes use, but when the rumen is unable to utilise all the ammonia it is absorbed through the rumen wall. However, ammonia is toxic, so the cow sends it to the liver to be converted into urea. From here it is excreted in the urine and milk while some of it is recycled via saliva.

Removing surplus ammonia via the liver takes energy which means less energy is available for the immune system and milk production.

Excesses of ammonia can result in cows not holding well to service, due to the high uterine pH commonly seen in association with high milk urea levels, typically over 350.

### **Reduce waste**

Novatan helps reduce the rate of protein breakdown which means less ammonia is produced in the rumen and that more protein bypasses the rumen altogether. Secondly, it stimulates protein syntheses by the rumen micro-organisms which then use up more ammonia. This means there is less surplus ammonia and consequently lower blood urea and reduced energy wastage. Novatan will improve protein digestion and help ensure the energy in grazing is diverted to milk production and not wasted.

By including Novatan, we can increase efficiency of protein utilisation across the whole diet.

Grazed grass does not contain a balanced supply of essential trace minerals and can leave cows at risk of a shortfall. If cows are unable to achieve adequate intakes of all the key minerals, they will be at an increased risk of poor foot health, lower conception rates and increased cell counts. So, the Planet Dairy range includes the FiMLAC mineral premix, which contains balanced levels of the key trace minerals in highly bioavailable forms to help keep cows productive, healthy and fertile.

The Planet Dairy range complements grazed grass to optimise rumen function, maintaining milk yields, quality and fertility at grazing while also helping reduce your carbon footprint by using predominantly UK sourced raw materials.

**For more information, talk to your Feed Specialist.**



# Farming thoughts

**New Year, Brexit deal done, and now we are in our third lockdown although hopefully we will see a way out of some restrictions as the vaccination rollout continues! So, what is happening for the foreseeable future?**

On the dairy front, cows are flying! We are seeing good yields, very good milk quality and fertility rates. Cheese manufacturers are saying they have never seen cheese yields so high. With hotels and hospitality currently closed, there seems to be too much liquid milk around to force farm gate prices up which is clearly needed. So, in the meantime, the focus needs to remain on cost-efficient production and making sure you are ready to turn cows out onto top quality pasture.

It is a different scenario in the beef and sheep sector. With the hospitality sector closed, consumers have had to shop more frequently at their local supermarkets. This has supported British farmers well, hence lamb and beef prices are way higher compared to this time last year. On the downside, increased Brexit red tape is holding up exports but hopefully, the ports and hauliers will sort out the customs problems so we can get our produce into Europe more quickly.

The lambing season will soon be in full swing and local scanners are saying there is a big crop of lambs on the way so make sure to plan your ewe diets carefully. With no shows or farm meetings permissible for a while, we have created a virtual sheep presentation online. Speak to your Feed Specialist for further details.

Current feed prices are held to 30th April 2021, but I should be able to let you know more about our summer prices in our next Feedtalk.



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## GRAINS AND STRAIGHTS UPDATE

**Finally, we have seen an agreement on Brexit, and much to everyone's relief a deal has been achieved. The pound did not rally as much as expected but we do not face tariffs on commodities and products we produce.**

Unfortunately, since the turn of the New Year, raw materials have continued to rise to levels we have not seen for several years. As I write, soya is trading in the £470s, wheat in the £220s and rape meal over £300 per tonne. Some ingredients are just not available.

Key drivers of prices currently are:

- Funds and speculators looking for a safe haven in agricultural commodities.
- La Nina weather patterns causing hot, dry conditions in South America.
- Reduction in global maize stocks, resulting in soya and wheat being forced up on the back of maize.
- Russia imposing an export tax on grains, making them uncompetitive exporters. This has put more pressure on European grains.

As we turn our attention to the summer, we expect the early part of the summer to be troublesome. Strikes in Argentina have caused delays to soya products, which has led to shortages in UK ports. Sugar beet appears extremely expensive and we must look at soya hulls at around £40 per tonne discount. Barley remains the most attractive ingredient but is increasing in price as ports are active buyers. We are looking forward to new crop prices with barley trading at around £150 per tonne ex-combine. Wheat is at a £15 per tonne premium, not the £45 per tonne which is where we currently stand.

**If you would like to discuss any of these matters, please do not hesitate to contact us.**



**Andrew Davies**  
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## BREEDING FOR PROFITABLE BEEF

**Alongside nutrition and health, genetics plays a key role in ensuring cattle convert grass and cereals into liveweight gain. Genetics is not just about bull selection, selecting maternal traits is just as important. We have two main sources of female genetics in beef production - the beef suckler cow and the dairy cow.**

When considering suckler cows, first you have to decide what you want your end product to look like and how you want it to perform. Are you going to use a grass-based system or are you going to grow and finish cattle on arable products? In general terms, grass-based systems favour early maturing breeds such as Angus, Devon, Hereford or Stabilizer, which will make the most of grazing and silage-based finishing rations. Intensive units may be best situated to doubled muscled continental breeds if the energy concentration of the diet is high enough to put on sufficient finish.

For a grazing system the beef cow needs to be highly fertile and calve regularly, have low maintenance requirements and rear a calf to 300kgs+ in 8-9 months.



Dairy cows used for beef production need to be at least 87.5 non-channel island and be mated to a sire that will produce a calf with the ability to finish by 20- 24 months.

It is well accepted that there is as much difference within breeds as there is between breeds so understanding the figures that come with AI bulls is quite challenging. Unfortunately, every breed then has its own system so you cannot easily compare between breeds. The two key figures you need to consider are the terminal Sire Index and the maternal Index.

**Let us discuss your genetic plans with you and help you to get the best performance possible from your cattle.**



**Bill Harper**  
Director  
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## PLAN NOW FOR SUCCESSFUL LAMBING

**With lambing already underway in some areas, there are several things to consider and plan to ensure lambing can go as smoothly as possible and maximise the number of healthy lambs ready to rear.**

Maximising lamb survival is a key issue at this time of year on all sheep flocks. Previous work has suggested that almost 50% of all lambing losses occur within the first 48 hours after birth, with around 60% of these losses being associated with nutrition.

Scanning ewes will ensure you know how many lambs' ewes are bearing in the run up to lambing, meaning ewes can be fed accordingly ensuring they are not under or over fed. Also, any barren ewes can be sold releasing feed space and stocks. I am hearing of some good results this year with several early lambing flocks 180% plus and March/April flocks scanning 200%.

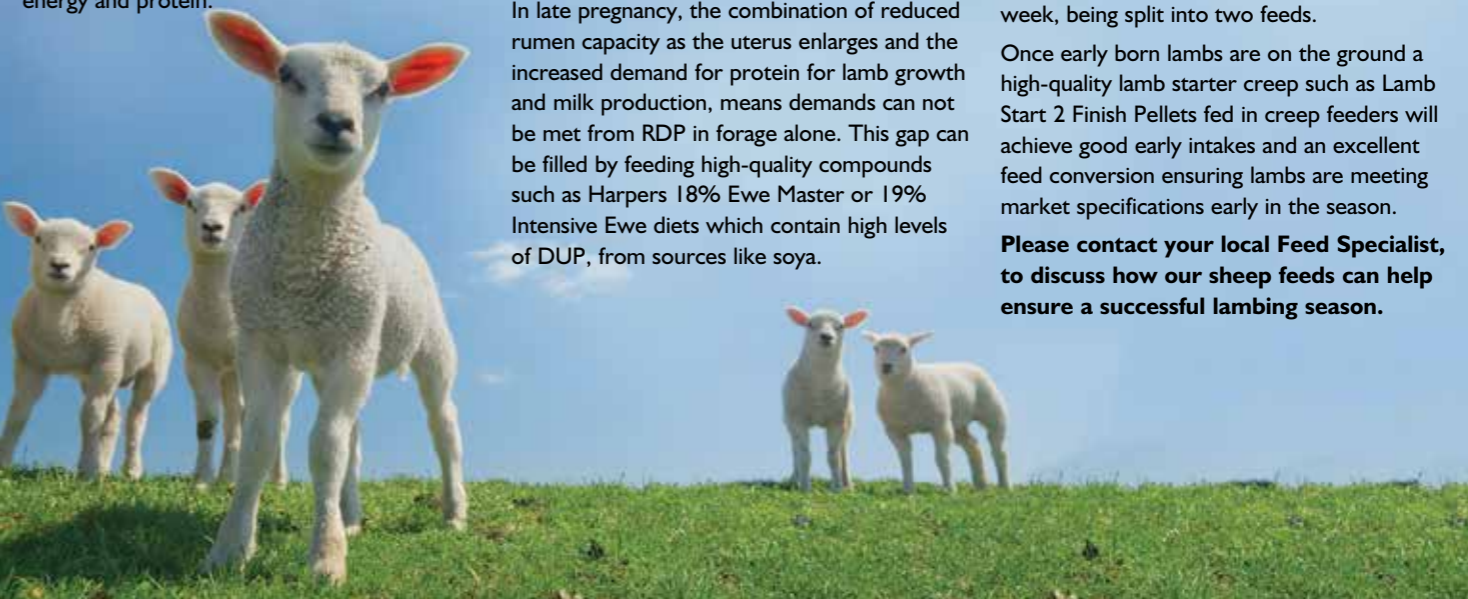
When looking at a compound pre-lambing diet it is essential to have a balance of starch, energy and protein.



Raw materials such as wheat and barley will provide starch, while sugarbeet and wheat gluten provide energy. Feeding adequate energy is essential to help maintain body condition and support the ewes' metabolic processes.

When it comes to protein, a balance is required between Rumen Degradable Protein (RDP) and Digestible Undegradable Protein (DUP) – also known as bypass protein as it is not digested in the rumen.

In late pregnancy, the combination of reduced rumen capacity as the uterus enlarges and the increased demand for protein for lamb growth and milk production, means demands can not be met from RDP in forage alone. This gap can be filled by feeding high-quality compounds such as Harpers 18% Ewe Master or 19% Intensive Ewe diets which contain high levels of DUP, from sources like soya.



The requirement for DUP is especially important in ewes carrying multiple lambs in the last three weeks of pregnancy.

It is essential that forage being fed pre-lambing is analysed to understand its nutritional value in terms of dry matter, energy and protein. This will allow any energy/protein deficiencies to be identified, allowing forage to be balanced with a suitable compound feed at the correct levels, stepping it up closer to lambing.

For example, an 80kg ewe carrying twins, receiving 10.5ME/day from forage requires an additional 14.4MJ/day four weeks pre lambing, increasing to an extra 20.2MJ/day one week before lambing. To fill this gap, the feed rate needs to be increased from 0.45kg/day four weeks before lambing to 0.7kg/day in the last week, being split into two feeds.

Once early born lambs are on the ground a high-quality lamb starter creep such as Lamb Start 2 Finish Pellets fed in creep feeders will achieve good early intakes and an excellent feed conversion ensuring lambs are meeting market specifications early in the season.

**Please contact your local Feed Specialist, to discuss how our sheep feeds can help ensure a successful lambing season.**



**Matt Dymond**  
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## REDUCE TWIN LAMB DISEASE WITH MOLASSES

**Ewes in late pregnancy are particularly prone to twin lamb disease, arising from the high nutritional demands placed on the ewe in the last two months of pregnancy when 70% of lamb growth takes place. This results in additional stress for both ewe and farmer at an already busy time of the year.**

Twin and triplet bearing ewes have a particularly high demand for energy, especially glucose, and as they get closer to lambing this demand increases. If these energy demands are not met, ewes can suffer from twin lamb disease. They can begin to metabolise their own body fat to try and meet these high energy



demands, leading to an excessive build-up of ketones to toxic levels in the body along with body condition loss.

Feeding a high energy, nutrient dense molasses based liquid feed can help reduce the risk of twin lamb disease. A low feed rate liquid feed offers an easy feeding system via a wheel lick feeder.

This helps encourage intakes particularly with shy feeders, as well as reducing competition and stress at feeding.

Molasses based liquid feeds are available in mini bulk or delivered in bulk loads. A wide range of free access wheel lick feeders are also offered from 35-250 litres. Liquid feeds should always be fed as part of a well-balanced diet.

**For more information, speak to your Feed Specialist.**



**Alex Cornish**  
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# PREPARING FOR THE GAME BREEDING SEASON

After what has been a difficult and frustrating season for most, we find ourselves in the midst of yet another national lockdown which has forced the end of the shooting season a whole month earlier than expected. For many businesses this was the worst possible outcome having incurred the cost and effort of rearing and releasing the birds and then being unable to shoot them.



With a large number of gamebirds left on the ground it means that there is an abundance of hens to catch up for the forthcoming breeding season. As a result, there may be an opportunity for the industry to become more self-sufficient and less reliant on the sourcing of foreign stock, which may prove more difficult going forward anyway as Brexit regulations come into effect.

The short season means game breeders will be receiving hens much earlier than usual, so it is important that birds are graded on their body condition and health status on arrival. Using County Game Maintenance Pellet over wheat gives breeding hens a complete diet that provides an energy and protein balance to keep them in a fit but not fat condition.

Feed programmes can be tailored to suit individual laying systems and provide gamebirds with optimal nutrition that aims to improve egg production for a longer laying period.

We continually work with key nutritionists across the industry to ensure our game breeding diets are formulated to support you with everything you require to have a successful laying season.

**For more information on our breeding diets and game feeds, give me a call or call the office on 01409 254 300.**



# TIME TO GET FERTILISER ORDERED

**Harpers Feeds are suppliers of Origin, Yara and CF fertilisers on a direct to farm basis.**

Origin fertilisers are a national manufacturer and distributor of fertilisers with a strong local presence. Products include a wide range of blended fertilisers, such as the innovative Seleni range and Sweet – Grass.

We can also supply Yara and CF fertilisers with options for compounds, straights and Nitrogen.

With prices currently firming and deliveries likely to come under pressure given the current Covid regulations, we recommend planning your requirements sooner rather than later.

**Please speak to one of our FACTS qualified advisors for advice and recommendations to ensure you choose the optimum fertiliser for your specific requirements.**



## GET PREPARED FOR TURNOUT

Speak to our RAMA qualified Feed Specialist now for more details of our special offers on wormers and fly control products to keep your animals performing to their potential at grass.

- Guaranteed Stock
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