



REDUCING THE RISK OF MILK FEVER

Using a calcium binder in the dry cow diet has virtually eliminated clinical milk fever cases on one Devon farm.

Andrew and Verlie Timms run a herd of 200 Holstein cows on their family farm at Okehampton. The 360 acre farm is situated over 800ft above sea level on the northern edge of Dartmoor. With maize not being a realistic option, they run a traditional grass based dairy system, grazing the high pastures in spring and summer and feeding grass silage-based diets indoors in the winter.

In the Spring of 2015, issues came to a head with their dry cows. It was a wet Spring and even though they were routinely treating all second calvers and above with calcium bottles they saw a significant amount of milk fever.

Calcium demand

Milk fever or hypocalcaemia is the result of low blood calcium at calving. The correct blood calcium level at calving is the most important factor to help ensure a good healthy start to the lactation. Calcium levels are crucial for smooth muscle tone which aids uterine contractions making calvings easier. It also plays a pivotal role in supporting the immune system.

At calving there is a sudden demand for calcium to produce colostrum and for the onset of lactation. This can drop blood calcium levels which can impair the cow's health and productivity.



X-Zelit binds calcium in the rumen, stimulating the cow's own hormonal system to mobilise body reserves creating a perfect calcium balance at calving. The result is a dramatic drop in levels of clinical and subclinical milk fever, which is difficult to spot and the gateway to metabolic issues, as well as increased health, fertility and post calving energy.

Return on investment

Andrew had heard that X-Zelit was a good product but had been reluctant to use it previously as it sounded expensive. Also, with the cows being outside he wasn't sure about grouping. However, the situation with the milk fever was so bad that he agreed to give it a try and has been using it ever since.

Dry cow management is based on a simple set up. They have one dry cow group that are fed X-Zelit for two weeks prior to calving. Cows are moved into a loose pen in the yard and they calve there.

With a large reduction in metabolic problems, cows are able to rise to peak yield unhindered. Cows presented to the vet for fresh checks have been clean and overall fertility and conception rates are also showing excellent improvements.

Andrews initial concerns about costs disappeared once he saw the return on investment.

To find out more about X-Zelit, speak to your Feed Specialist.



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Farming thoughts

Our Pricing

Well, it's certainly been a hungry time! I've never known a May when we've fed every animal on the farm. A few weeks ago, we were desperate for rain. Now as I write this article, it doesn't know when to stop! This has put pressure on spot raw material availability and price.

We have always had a policy at Harpers to buy our 'book' little and often. Every time there is a dip in the market, we take some cover. We don't gamble with the markets, instead using common sense so that we can give you, our customer, a fixed formulation and price for a period.

Our current price list is fixed from 1st May until 31st August 2021. We have three price changes per year, which are 1st September, 1st January and 1st May. One thing is for sure, the rain will help the grain and we will not compromise on your stocks' performance.

New Website

Over the last few months, we have been working hard to develop our new website. I am pleased to say it is now live. You can find information on all our product ranges and leaflets as well as having the ability to create your own bespoke blend to suit your farming system. Take five minutes to have a browse and let me know what you think. We value feedback from our customers and always look at ways to improve and develop our services for you.

Let's be Social

Staff from Harpers Feeds and Harpers Farm Supplies have been busy filming for some videos which will be used on our social media and will be available on our website soon. As we won't be seeing you at many agricultural shows this summer, we still want to catch up with you and let you know what we've been up to.

Continued Development

We invest in our staff and their development. Recently the sales team have completed a course in youngstock signals with renowned trainer Joep Driessen. The team are now in the process of completing a Master course in Cow Signals, which will ensure we continue to give our farmers the best advice.



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GRAINS AND STRAIGHTS UPDATE

Just as we thought the market was starting to ease, we have seen a bounce and lack of availability on some ingredients.

Cold, dry weather across many parts of the world created increased feed demand, leading to ingredient shortages. With higher prices there was an anticipation of lower feed demand, with buyers also reluctant to commit. The result is that with premium values, shippers will not import unsold ingredients, leading to shortages.

Old crop barley is virtually unavailable and where it is trading similar to wheat, we will see a reduction in demand. On the back of global prices, new crop cereal prices have gone up by around £20/t, with ex-farm harvest prices at the time of writing at £170/t for wheat and £155/t for barley.

The UK wheat crop does look promising with potentially a 14.1 million tonne crop compared to a sub 10 million tonne crop last year. Russia and the Black Sea region have the ability to produce a huge crop of around 80 million tonnes.

The main concern for cereals is the low global stocks of maize, which will affect global wheat prices. Currently, there is real concern over the size of the Brazilian maize crop, which could be reduced by up to 20 million tonnes! The USDA reduced the global maize crop by 8.59 million tonnes but the trade prediction is that this has been underestimated.

Soya looks as if it is going to remain relatively firm, with low global stocks. Currently, it is very difficult to see how prices can ease below £350/t and if we have a problem in the US with any crop harvest then look out!

To summarise, as one trader said, "this is going to be one of the most difficult years for trading we have seen for some time." Low stocks, high fund activity and unusual weather patterns will all lead to high volatility.

To keep up to date with where the markets are, sign up to our weekly straights update from our Raw Materials team.



Andrew Davies
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MAKE MORE OF MUCK

As part of our commitment to drive efficiency and reduce emissions we have found a manure management system which looks really promising.

Most beef producers clean out loose cattle sheds in the spring and stack the dung, letting it rot down during the summer. This process has a number of problems including slow breakdown of straw, run off of harmful liquids containing nitrous oxide and ammonium nitrate, and not least methane and ammonia emissions to the atmosphere. More importantly, over 60% of the nutrients in the stack will be lost before the product is spread. We believe the solution is to ferment the product to produce 'Bokashi', Japanese for 'well fermented organic matter.'

Fermentative decomposition creates a nutrient diverse end-product that will be a real soil improver. The system involves treating the dung in the shed with effective micro-organisms using a product called ActiFerm before cleaning out. This creates an environment where fermentative anaerobes can dominate.

ActiFerm is applied at 2 litres/tonne of dung along with 1% per tonne of Aegir (crushed seashells) to raise the pH. The dung is then stacked outside and sheeted with an old silage sheet weighted with tyres and left to ferment for 8-10 weeks.

The benefits of the system are

- No harmful emissions
- Ready to use in 8-10 weeks.
- Better retention of nutrients
- Pre-digested food for soil
- Increased soil organic matter

With a little work and a small investment, you can turn your FYM into a valuable organic fertiliser which you can graze on a week after spreading.

For more information, please speak to your Feed Specialist.



Bill Harper
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WHOLECROP CAN FILL THE FORAGE GAP

Faced with reduced first cut yields and a potential forage shortfall this winter, it could pay to look closely at making fermented wholecrop this summer.

Wholecrop provides a highly digestible, fermentable starch energy source, while its high straw content provides physically effective fibre.

Wholecrop can provide a valuable forage and is more flexible than many people imagine. Spring and winter crops are equally suited to wholecrop silage and barley, wheat and triticale produce an excellent feed. By allowing a range of harvest dates, it can be cut strategically as the season unfolds. Varying the cutting date makes it possible to manipulate the yield, dry matter and nutritional value of the crop.

Dry matter content in wholecrop silage averages 30-45%. Fermented wholecrop winter wheat typically yields 12tDM/ha when harvested early, rising to 18-20tDM/ha when harvested later, with ME consistent at around 10.4MJ/kgDM. Harvesting 10 hectares of Wholecrop would give 120-200tDM.

Correct inoculant choice

Because of the higher dry matter and straw in wholecrop, it can be much harder to compact during ensiling than grass silage, meaning there is a higher risk of residual oxygen causing fermentation problems as well as oxygen penetration and aerobic spoilage when the crop is being fed. It is important to use an effective crop and condition specific inoculant.

If there are pockets of oxygen in the clamp, yeast and mould can survive and become active, causing spoilage, so it is crucial to use an inoculant that is specifically designed to inhibit yeast and mould. Traditional silage inoculants only provide acidifying bacteria that produce lactic acid, but this is not enough for wholecrop.

Magniva Platinum Wholecrop provides a unique combination of antifungal bacteria (*L. hilgardii* CNCM I-4785, *L. buchneri* NCIMB 40788) and homofermentative bacteria (*P. pentosaceus*), designed to inhibit yeasts and moulds and produce a rapid fermentation respectively. This combination of bacteria produces lactic, acetic and propionic acid.

Adding the incorrect silage inoculant to wholecrop can potentially make things worse when feeding the silage. Without the antifungal bacteria there to inhibit yeast and moulds during fermentation and feedout, they will become active once the clamp is opened and will use the lactic acid produced by the homofermentative bacteria as a feed source.

For more information about making wholecrop and Magniva inoculants, talk to your Feed Specialist.



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GET THE MOST FROM MID-SEASON GRASS

Prospects for mid-season grass growth are looking good, so there will be a great opportunity to compensate for some of the lost performance during the very dry early spring. If you want to maximise performance at grazing, you need to select the right supplementary feed.

The focus must be on making sure milk price is maximised by maintaining high milk quality while achieving the maximum contribution from grazed grass. As grazing is not a perfectly balanced feed and because both quality and quantity of grazing will vary, it will be essential to supplement grazing both nutritionally and cost-effectively.

To get the best from grazing you need to ensure grass is managed to deliver high yields of young, digestible and high quality grazing. It is also essential to minimise wasted grass.

Turn cows into paddocks when the grass cover is around 2700kgDM/ha, taking them out when they have grazed down to 1500kgDM/ha. Look to achieve a grazing dry matter intake of 12-14kg per cow per day and then supplement precisely to achieve the target total dry matter intakes and complement grazed grass.

Climate friendly concentrate

Harpers Feeds Planet Dairy is an ideal supplement for grazing cows, containing no soya meal, soya hulls, palm oil, palm kernel or C16 fat. All ingredients are sourced with the minimum possible food miles. The blend of ingredients will help cows perform efficiently at grass while helping meet the objectives of milk buyers for more sustainable milk production.

Barley, sugar beet pulp and wheatfeed give high energy with a blend of starch and fibre energy sources for effective rumen function. A good balance of proteins is needed to complement grazing so wheat gluten, beans, wheat distillers and sunflower are included.

Keeping butterfats up at grazing can be a challenge. High oil levels in the diet can depress butterfat percentage as the rumen bugs cannot digest fibre effectively with excessive levels of oil. Low included oil levels in the Planet Dairy range help to reduce the level in the overall diet, helping improve butterfat synthesis.

Grazed grass is widely known as an inconsistent source of minerals, so the Planet Dairy range contains our FiMLAC mineral premix, specifically formulated to contain balanced levels of trace minerals with high levels of bio-availability to help maintain fertility, health, and production at grass.

With volatile global feed costs, making more of grazed grass this year will be more important than ever to help you take control of costs. Planet Dairy will help your cows produce to their potential at grass and help reduce your carbon footprint too.

For more information, talk to your Feed Specialist.



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COST EFFECTIVE CALF GROWTH

Your heifer calves are the future of your business while well-reared beef cross calves can be a valuable income stream, so they need to be reared well.

The objective of rearing pre-weaned calves is to optimise growth rates as cost-effectively as possible. With milk prices rising, now is a good time to stop feeding whole milk to calves.

If you are feeding six litres of saleable whole milk to a calf at 30 pence per litre, the daily cost is £1.80/calf. At 32p/l this increases to £1.92 whether you are feeding dairy replacements or beef calves.

Research shows that calf milk replacers are a better-balanced feed for calves than whole milk. We have a carefully selected range of milk powders that will meet your calves' requirements and ensure better growth rates while also saving you money. All our milk powders are British made and we have skimmed milk and whey-based products to suit all systems.

If you feed 900g/day of a milk replacer mixed to supply six litres of mixed milk replacer, your cost could be as little as £1.45/calf.



While our highest specification milk replacer, Milkvit Energizer which has outstanding digestibility and energy content will cost slightly more, the benefits in improved growth rates will ensure an excellent return.

Alongside milk, calves need a good quality, highly digestible and palatable concentrate. We have a range of fixed formulation pellets, nuts and mixes to complement milk replacers and build good intakes ahead of weaning.

To find out more about our calf rearing range and to review your system to optimise growth and health, speak to your Feed Specialist.



NOT LONG UNTIL CHRISTMAS

It's time to start thinking about feeding your turkeys for Christmas. Our range of feeds help improve flock performance with excellent growth rates for a well-finished bird.

With our fixed formulated rations, you can be sure that your flock is being fed a consistent diet, containing only the highest quality raw materials to provide a balanced supply of energy and protein. Our range includes starter, rearing, growing and finishing feeds and we can develop a programme to suit your system.

Bio-mos is incorporated into our diets to improve gut health and immune function, helping to improve turkey growth and health.

Although our minimum drop is one tonne, if you are having other bag products then you can always have a few bags of turkey feed on top if you are not rearing many birds.

To discuss our turkey range, speak to your Feed Specialist.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

We have all missed the shows over the last year. All being well, we plan to attend the following shows and look forward to meeting with you again.

2 nd - 4 th July	Devon County Show	Westpoint, Exeter
24 th July	Mid Devon Show	Chettiscombe, Tiverton
5 th - 6 th August	Honiton Show	Gittisham
11 th August	Exford Show	Exford, TA24 7PR
12 th August	Okehampton Show	Stoney Park, EX20 1SW
18 th September	Harpers Industrial Estate Open Day	Holsworthy Industrial Estate, EX22 6FU



Harpers Feeds

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