TOMORROW'S FARMER

DECEMBER / 2025 / ISSUE 76

CMC
crediton milling company
Feeding Tomorrows Farmers Today

Seeing further through nutrition and health

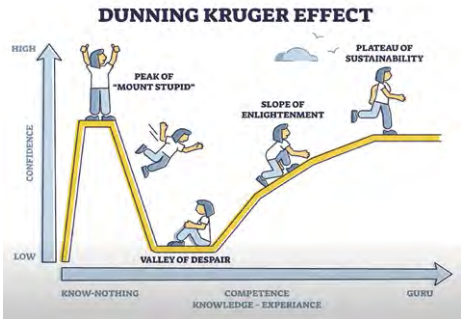
So, eight months into my first new job in 32 years, how's it going? It's a great question and one I've been asking myself as I reflect on 2025 so far.

What's struck me most is that, whichever lens you look through, the challenges on farm remain largely the same. But the potential solutions expand the moment you lift your eyes from what feels safe and familiar. After all those years as a Farm Vet, I felt confident about what I did know. But curiosity about what I didn't know played a big part in my career move, "the more you know, the more you realise you don't know." So where has that taken me?

Problems are like onions; scratch the surface and each answer reveals another layer of questions. Knowledge for its own sake rarely solves the day-to-day pressure points on farm, but a deeper understanding makes it far easier, and much safer, to evaluate proposed solutions. Much of my journey this year has been about gathering information to enable exactly that. I've been re-learning and deepening my understanding of rumen function, exploring what influences it, and bringing that knowledge back to practical, workable on-farm fixes.

With surprising regularity, the challenges and solutions I'm seeing across farms are remarkably similar. The non-negotiables still come first: space, comfort, water, environment, disease. But when you layer in a deeper understanding of rumen efficiency, you can start getting far more from what you're already putting in.

So how has all this shaped my development, and what does it bring to CMC customers? The Dunning–Kruger curve has helped me frame that. I revisited it while preparing a talk on Transition Cow management and couldn't help but smile; I've watched it play out countless times over the years. Now, whenever a question is raised or a solution offered, I ask myself where it places me on that curve.



You can't have good animal health without good nutrition, and nutrition won't work without good animal health.

I've always believed the two were intrinsically linked to production on farm. Now, that belief feels absolute and non-negotiable. It's tempting to hunt for solutions only within the disciplines we know best, but real progress comes from being willing to collaborate with multiple trusted advisors. I'm fortunate now to be in a position where I can help facilitate those conversations.

Ultimately, it all comes back to relationships and trust, things that cost very little but offer huge value to your herds and flocks. We should all feel confident picking up the phone to colleagues in other professions to share observations, even when they fall outside our usual remit. Our aims are the same: to help you control the controllables and build healthy, resilient farms.

And perhaps, from time to time, we should each ask ourselves; where are we on the curve?

Hopefully high enough to see just a bit further.

STUART GOUGH 07854 955778
RUMINANT DEVELOPMENT

Challenging traditional beliefs about dairy nutrition

DR KAREN WONNACOTT
07783 152450
RUMINANT NUTRITIONIST

Last month Crediton Milling were delighted to host Zinpro's Dr Huw McConochie, Research Nutritionist, for a series of 'Rumen Roadshows' across the South West.

These interactive workshops and discussions challenged traditional beliefs about dairy nutrition, focusing on the critical role of rumen health and muscle tissue development in heifers for long-term lactation success.

Dr McConochie set the scene by challenging the thinking around how accurate we really are at estimating mature bodyweights. Historically, producers have used cull weights to estimate the herds typical mature weight, however, this is fundamentally flawed as those animals selected for culling are outliers from the herd. They have been selected to be culled for various reasons, but they all have one thing in common – that cow is no longer considered productive in that dairy system. Dr McConchie said, "Estimating a cows mature body weight by eye is impossible, just as it is to estimate the body composition of fat to muscle ratio". Getting accurate bodyweights at different stages of lactation is crucial to accurate rationing of those cows due to the impact body weight has on nutrient demand.

Building muscle for lactation success

Dr. McConochie challenged attendees to rethink how they assess mature body weight and muscle development in their herds.

We need to consider age of first service in replacement heifers. "When should we be breeding our heifers? Are they grown well enough? Are they too fat or too thin and have they built enough muscle?" These factors should be all considered before deciding what age we look to breed our heifers.

"A heifer's ability to build muscle during growth directly impacts her milk production potential in the first lactation," Dr. McConochie explained. Heifers with insufficient muscle reserves are more prone to social bullying, reduced feed access, and lower milk yields. Additionally, muscle tissue serves as a critical energy reserve during early lactation, supporting milk production when energy demands are highest.

Currently it is difficult to differentiate on-farm between fat and muscle in our animals and, just like bodyweight, it's impossible to do by eye. Dr. McConochie encouraged producers to consider innovative methods, such as muscle depth ultrasound scanning, to assess muscle reserves.

Research from Purdue University has shown that cows with greater muscle reserves prepartum mobilise more muscle during early lactation, resulting in higher milk yields.

This underscores the importance of providing heifers with balanced diets that include adequate concentrates and high-quality protein to support muscle growth.

Practical takeaways for producers

1. **Feed the Rumen First:** Prioritise rumen health by supplying essential nutrients like BCVFA through Zinpro IsoFerm. This supports fibre-digesting bacteria, enhances protein and energy utilisation, and improves overall cow performance.
2. **Focus on Muscle Development:** Ensure heifers receive balanced diets with sufficient protein and energy to build muscle reserves. This sets the foundation for higher milk yields and better health in the first lactation.
3. **Measure, Don't Guess:** Regularly weigh cows and consider advanced tools like muscle depth scanning to accurately assess body weight and muscle reserves. This data is crucial for precise rationing and optimising performance.

By adopting a "Rumen First" approach and prioritising muscle tissue deposition in heifers, producers can unlock the full potential of their herds. These strategies not only improve milk production but also enhance cow welfare and long-term profitability.

For more information on any of these interesting subject areas, please contact Crediton Milling: cmc@creditonmilling.co.uk or 01363 772212.

Is your forage getting hot?

How to spot it, stop it, and protect your winter forage stocks

Warm or heating forage is one of those common winter issues that can creep up almost unnoticed. Even when the weather feels cold enough to keep everything quiet, yeasts and moulds will quickly become active once air reaches the clamp.

As soon as that happens, the silage starts to heat, energy is burnt off, and unwanted microorganisms begin to grow. This often leads to lower intakes, lower milk yields, reduced DLWG, and at times proper digestive problems in stock.

With forage stocks tight on many farms this winter, it is worth taking a closer look at the clamp to make sure every tonne is working for you rather than disappearing into thin air.

1. **Why silage heats, even in winter**
   Heating kicks off the moment oxygen reaches the silage surface. Once exposed, yeasts come back to life, multiply, and burn off valuable nutrients as heat. Cold weather might slow this down, but it certainly does not stop it. The usual triggers tend to be things like a loose sheet that is not held down firmly, rough faces where air can creep in, slow feedout or taking too big a bite at once, shoulders that have been left open to rain or wind, or even carrying warm, unstable silage into the TMR. Every hour the clamp is heating, it is losing ME, and your livestock will feel the effects.

2. **Early signs that silage is heating**
   Most farmers notice the knock on effects before realising the clamp is warming up. The obvious clues include silage that feels warm or slightly steamy in the hand, a sweet or yeasty smell that is a bit out of place, cows backing off the ration or picking around it, milk fat slipping, dung looking looser than normal, and any patches of mould, especially the white yeast you see on top and down the sides. You might also see warm spots developing in the TMR a few hours after mixing. Even a small rise in temperature can point to quite a bit of nutrient loss.

3. **Clamp face, keeping it tight, clean and safe**
   A neat, firm, and vertical face is still the best line of defence against air getting in. Avoid clawing or digging silage out, as this leaves the face ragged. A shear grab or block cutter gives a much cleaner finish. Only remove what you expect to feed within twenty-four hours and aim to take roughly 15 to 30 cm per day to stay ahead of spoilage.

4. **Sheet integrity, winter weather's quiet threat**
   Wind can undo a well-made clamp surprisingly quickly in December. It is worth checking that top sheets are properly weighted with gravel bags rather than tyres on their own. Small holes should be patched straight away, as even a tiny tear can let in surprising amounts of air. Make sure side sheets are still tucked and pulled tight and keep an eye on rain pooling on top as this stretches and weakens the plastic. A quick tidy of the sheet often saves a lot of forage.

5. **Shoulder management, the most exposed area**
   Shoulders are usually the first place to heat. Taking clean, vertical cuts right up against the wall helps protect them. Avoid scooping material from the sides and keep the side sheets held down firmly. If shoulder waste crops up year after year, it may be worth looking at stabilisers or additives during clamp building. Losses from the shoulders often account for half of total clamp waste, so tightening this up can make a real difference.

6. **Controlling heating at feedout**
   Silage that has been well made can still heat once mixed if it sits for too long. Regular push ups help, especially for high yielding cows that rely on steady intakes. Try not to mix warm or obviously mouldy patches into the TMR and consider stabilisers such as potassium sorbate based products if heating continues through winter. Keeping the mixer wagon clean reduces yeast build up and keeps the ration more stable.

Final thoughts

If the clamp is getting hot, you are losing energy, dry matter, and money without realising it. Winter clamp management rarely needs big investment, but a few small changes to how the face is handled, how the sheets are looked after, and how feedout is managed usually pays back very quickly. A cooler clamp gives better forage, more settled cows, and feed costs that are a little easier to live with during the long winter months.

MARK TUCKER 07703734530
FORAGE SPECIALIST

Avian Influenza
What CAN we do?

Undoubtedly, Avian Influenza (AI) is the biggest challenge facing our industry, and due to its indiscriminate nature, it feels like a lottery as to where it will crop up next.

I think everyone would agree that there is so much about AI and its transmission that we don't understand, especially how it gets into units when we know biosecurity is strong. Whilst it would be impossible to eliminate the risk of AI, what can we do to reduce the risk?

Biosecurity

Whilst this is obvious, good biosecurity is essential. Wheel wash/spray on entry to the farm and any area's feed/egg lorries will go. Change foot dips every day, change footwear over every barrier and wear overalls and wash and sanitise your hands when in the bird area. It's also important that footwear is clean – disinfectant is not effective on contaminated boots.

It is worth investing in house specific tools and equipment so that there is no need to move them between houses and where possible personnel should not visit multiple houses on any given day. Dogs should not access the general biosecurity area, as this makes all your other provisions worthless.

Rainwater

Assume the virus is everywhere, therefore when it rains there is the potential for the rainwater to wash AI into sheds. Make sure there are no holes in the roof, leaking gutters, seeping flood water, drips through the popholes, even a drip could contain enough virus to infect a flock of birds. This is a real challenge to producers keeping birds in mobile houses. I've seen producers dig ditches around the shed to take water away from the birds or use sandbags to prevent water running underneath into the scratch.

Visitors

Only permit essential visitors into the bird area, and even if they are essential ask what bird contact they have had in the previous 72 hours. Don't be afraid to say no! It is also worth thinking about who accesses the birds on farm, and how many times a day are actually required.

Vermin/wild birds

We never want rats and mice, but it's more important than ever to keep them out of sheds now. Some of the best pest control officers are farmers, purely because they have a vested interest in getting it right and monitor the situation regularly.

What can we do about wild birds? Very little, but we can make sure they cannot access the house, which may require the netting of ventilation inlets. Also make sure there is nothing for wild birds to eat anywhere near the unit.

Litter

Where possible do not add extra litter to the scratch area. If it is essential or for a new flock it should have been stored in a clean and dry area and ideally wrapped to reduce the risk of contamination from wild birds or water.

Enrichment

Similarly to litter, enrichment should be stored in a dry secure building and sprayed with disinfectant before giving it to the birds.

Training

It's really important that all staff, family, visitors and suppliers abide by your rules to prevent AI entering your business, therefore, taking time to make sure everyone understands your expectations is a really good idea, ideally signing to acknowledge their understanding.

Obviously, none of this means you won't get AI, but if we do what we can and reduce the chances, we might prevent a few outbreaks.

DAVID HOPE 07751 743080
POULTRY SPECIALIST