

TOMORROW'S FARMER



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DAIRY

POULTRY

BEEF & SHEEP

FORAGE

CONCENTRATING ON THE BIG AND FORGETTING THE SMALL?

The real importance of water

We talk a lot about the big changes/challenges we see on farms on a day-to-day basis i.e., changing rations, fertility results and lameness percentages. What if we feed this adapted ration or if we reduce our lameness by 10%? The farm will be more profitable which is 100% correct. However, we all talk about these things and the impact it has on our farms and our profitability but what about the small stuff? Are we just focusing on the big changes we can make and not the small ones? Can these small changes make big impacts?

The answer is YES.



Cows are simple animals, and they just want a chilled-out life. Below left is a diagram created by the CowSignals® company which shows all the needs of a happy, healthy cow.

So why is water so important? Nearly 87% of cow's milk is water. The less she drinks, the less she is likely to eat, which will lead to lower milk yields and body condition loss. It's key that we encourage as much water intake as possible using clean, fresh, free-flowing water troughs and providing enough drinking space. A cow can drink up to 20 litres per minute, so having enough water pressure is very important, especially on those hotter days or on the exit to the milking parlour. The rule of thumb is 10cm per cow drinking space or at least 10% of the group/herd should be able to drink at any one time. A 40-litre cow will drink around 200 litres a day, which is the same as a blue chemical drum per cow per day!

The main advantages of providing clean, fresh water are:

- Increased dry matter intake
- Increased average daily liveweight gains
- Increased milk production
- Decreased likelihood of illness and disease

It is just as important to have fresh water for the cows that are out to grass as it is when they are housed. Cows are pretty lazy and don't really want to walk miles to have a drink. Also if they get there and it's not very appetising, it doesn't encourage them to keep coming back to

the water trough. Some won't bother and will become dehydrated, especially in the heat that we saw at certain times during last summer. Heat stress coupled with a lack of water supply, or nasty tasting water, is a recipe for disaster. A cow will not walk more than 250 metres to a water trough and we need to think about this when we are setting up our grazing platform/paddocks etc. When a cow is in the process of calving the last thing she is thinking about is eating and drinking. So, when she has calved, it's fundamental that we treat her like royalty. She needs fresh silage and plenty of fresh, clean water. Cows love warm water and will drink a lot more of it, so if you can give her a couple buckets of warm water straight after calving, it's a bonus. She has this huge space to fill now the calf has gone, so the quicker we can get water and forage into her, the less the risk of post-calving issues such as displaced abomasum (DA) and excessive negative energy balance.

Some signs to look out for if the cows don't want to drink:

1. Drinking near the ball valve because the water there is fresher
2. Flicking the water with their tongues because the water is not palatable
3. Seeking other sources of water such as puddles etc.

I appreciate that some water troughs are easier to clean than others but if we can spend half an hour a week cleaning the troughs and encouraging

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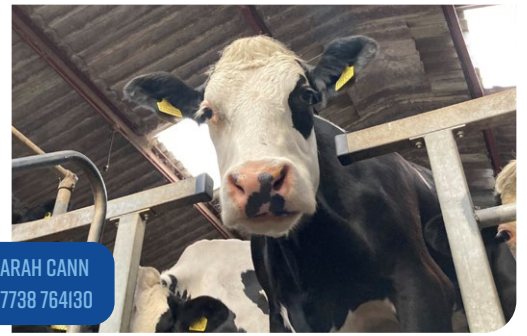
more water intake then the return will be worth it. Just tipping the water out won't do, it needs either power washing or scrubbing to remove build-up of debris and slime, even around ball valves and the cover.

Water quality is also important. Boreholes can cause problems with increases in minerals which will lock up trace elements, so it's essential that you get your water sources analysed regularly. Also, check your water storage tanks! If they are dirty, it doesn't matter if you clean your water troughs every day, the cows still won't want to drink the water coming into them.

These girls are our formula one cars..... let's keep them on track!



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DO YOU KNOW YOUR COWS INSIDE AND OUT?

WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN DOING A JOB FOR A LONG TIME, THINGS CAN BECOME QUITE ROUTINE-DRIVEN, AND FARMING IS NO EXCEPTION. IF YOU HAVE SPENT YOUR LIFE IN AND AROUND COWS, IT CAN BE EASY SOMETIMES TO TAKE THESE AMAZING ANIMALS FOR GRANTED.



Day in, day out, we ask our cows to 'put up with' the environment that we provide them with i.e., the cubicles they lie in, the trough we put their feed in and the amount we feed.

But do we ever stand back to appreciate that these animals truly depend on us for everything?

We have a vital role to play in ensuring that our animals have fresh, clean water and feed in front of them 24 hours a day, seven days a week, **without exception**. They rely on us to milk them, keep them clean, provide them with comfy beds. In return they hopefully provide us with high quality, delicious milk, a strong and healthy calf once a year and a healthy and profitable lactation. We all crave the cows you never see, that never cause you any problems, milk well, get in calf and thrive. But how often do we present the same cows to the vet and/or artificial insemination (AI) technician and how often do we say to ourselves 'that cow has always been poor?' If you can bring some of these cows to mind now, perhaps we need a bit of a farm review and we need to give more thought to how our cows are on the inside?

Over the past few months, CMC have run a series of 'Knowing your cow inside and out meetings' across the SW. As you are aware, ruminants have four stomachs: the rumen, reticulum, omasum, and abomasum. The rumen and reticulum are where most of the fermentation and nutrient absorption occurs.

Rumen health is vital to cow health

The rumen takes up 70-80% of 'stomach' volume in an adult cow and its volume is about 180 – 240 litres (40 – 55 gallons). The health of this stomach is crucial to cow health and performance. What does a healthy rumen look like? How can we ensure that what we feed our cows keeps the rumen healthy?

The rumen itself is made up of a liquid phase, a rumen mat, which floats above the rumen liquor, and gas sitting above the rumen mat. 'Pillars' divide the rumen into sacs, and it is the shortening of these pillars that cause these important rumen contractions. The wall of the rumen is covered by many small, finger-like projections called papillae that increase the surface area and therefore increase absorption area. The papillae change in number and size as diet changes (as does the rumen microbial population). We often say that it can take the rumen up to 21 days to acclimatise to any dietary change.

Essentially, if we provide the rumen and its microflora with sufficient starch, protein, fibre and vitamins and minerals, the bugs themselves provide the cow with the resources she needs to produce milk and muscle effectively and efficiently!

The other stomachs all have their role to play

The reticulum is part of the fermentation site but it plays a more significant role in filtering larger feed particles and foreign objects. The omasum consists of leaves or flaps (sometimes referred to as the 'bible') which absorb water and some nutrients, prevent the passage of large feed particles and potentially operate

to physically grind and breakdown feed particles. The abomasum (sometimes called true stomach) is lined with glands to release hydrochloric acid and digestive enzymes needed to break down food.

The main points from our meetings were:

- What you feed to your cows has wide ranging effects on multiple body parts.
- Remember you are feeding microbes not cows (for the most part).
- When something is going wrong you must look back a surprisingly long way in the cows' life to find a potential issue.
- Attention to detail and good management really are the key to success.
- Cows are prey species (have an inherent fear of unfamiliar objects/people but become accepting of routine).
- Look after the lungs – these animals are not built to run! Think about the work rate of our cows – they are doing such a lot.
- Value of a post-mortem - helps us to ascertain cause of death, state of liver, rumen health, can help us make more informed decisions about our herd management
- **Fundamentally, our cows rely on us for everything** – we need to think more like a cow, more often!

A huge thanks to all our host farmers, to the vets that helped to pull these meetings together and to all of you that were able to attend, we hope that you took home some helpful information! If you would like to find out more or discuss any of the points in more detail, please give me a call.



DR KAREN WONNAGOTT
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Whilst we were filming one of the PMs in preparation for the meetings, we found this piece of wire (possibly from an old tyre used on a silage clamp?) in the reticulum which, very unfortunately for this cow, had gone through the reticulum and into her liver causing an enormous abscess which was probably the reason why she was culled.

Our next 'Knowing your cows inside and out' meeting takes place on Tuesday 7th June 2022 by kind permission of the Tuffin Family, Brickyard Farm, Sturminster Newton DT10 2HS in conjunction with Friars Moor Livestock Health. Please contact the office for more information.

GRAZING ADVICE FOR DEMIGODS IN TRAINING!



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Let's cut to the chase. . . . if you haven't been a forage/grazing God over the last few years then you are unlikely to be one this year just because you want to be. . . . However, that doesn't mean that you can't make progress and more profit from forage. As we approach June and July let's look at potential challenges to that God-like status.

1. June is often dry and regrowth can be poor. Grazing low grass heights means that cows must walk further to fill up. The result is often a loss of dry matter intake and therefore a loss of energy. The result is milk protein and production decline if you are not fast enough to buffer or make the decision to drop night/daytime grazing
2. Buffering is a bigger requirement if you're grazing Holsteins. Remember they just can't graze as tight as Crossbreds or Jerseys. If the grazing you have is very short or alternatively tall and overgrown, then butterfats are likely to decline.
3. When the rains come after a dry spell and grazing returns, you will need to re-educate the cows to graze. If the grazing has grown, but is now feggy (dead in the bottom) and gone to seed, why would they want to graze more? They will just stand and shout and you will feed more down the trough! Make sure you have tidied up pastures with a mower whilst it was dry so that the rain stimulates good quality regrowth from a clean base.
4. Do not forget to maximise grazing intake by turning out straight after milking as their appetite for fibre will be high. Sending them out with buffer inside them will encourage them to lie on that lovely regrowth and not eat it.
5. Grass protein levels are hard to utilise fully so make sure that there is enough quality by-pass protein in the diet to sustain milk protein. This year is one where using an additive to enhance protein utilisation is going to pay by making use of that expensive fertiliser that you have spread. . . . which reminds me. . . .
6. Spread fertiliser regularly!
7. You must have clean water access for drinking! In hot weather cows use this for cooling and so easy access to lots of litres for lots of cows at once, (a cow can drink more than 150 litres) is vital. Leave them to gorge water on return to the farm and you will lose yield and likely trigger FPD issues with your milk quality that result in payment penalties.
8. If you haven't already done it, then create paddocks. They don't have to be pretty rectangular blocks, they can fan out from a central point to maximise the use of a water trough, for example. You will grow more grass this way.
9. Footbath and trim cow's feet regularly. Forget about bathing for things like digital dermatitis (DD) because the weather is dry, and you will see a massive spike in lame cows as wet weather comes in and ground conditions change.
10. If the season is wet or you have established great regrowth after a dry spell, then give cows access to some aggressive fibre like straw. Make sure it's fresh. If they are eating your hedges, they are short of fibre.
11. If it's hot then maybe graze at night and house during the day. Heat stress will depress milk quality and yield as well as affect feet and fertility.
12. Do not forget the water. . . . See point 7.

We are here to help and would rather you phoned to discuss a challenge than waited for it to become a major issue. Let's make sure we discuss what is going on.

MILKING YOUR ASSETS AS WELL AS YOUR COWS!



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JOHN CANN
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Last week I visited farms with John Cann with the aim to learn more about robotic milking. John is one of our robot specialists at CMC, as well as running a robot on his family farm; he really does see both sides of the fence! Robotic milking is not for everyone and there are lots of factors to consider when making a change to your system. Investing in a robotic milking machine is a big change for most farms and we need to get as much from your machines as we possibly can. I learnt a lot by spending my day with John seeing a variety of set ups. Therefore, I wanted to share some of main points I picked up which might benefit your systems.

‘Milking the asset as well as your cows’ when I asked John about yield per cow on a robot system he said that ‘historically that’s what we have spoken about, yield per cow. But with robots you also must think about yield per box/robot. To get the maximum potential from your robot (your asset) you are aiming to get 2000 litres per box per day or above. Whether that is milking 70 cows doing 28 litres or 50 doing 40 litres. But we can’t just look at one figure. A 40-litre average might sound amazing, but what are the days in milk (DIM)? You can’t just look at one performance indicator as a measure of success because that can hide how the herd is actually performing.’

I asked John “What are the three main things that you have learnt from dealing with robots that you think every farmer should know?”

John replied:

1. “Not to over complicate it”
2. “Cows adapt to robots quicker than people”
3. “A robot is not a relief milker”

The robot farms we saw are doing a really good job, but I know this isn’t always the case and there

are bound to be areas for improvement. John said that some key points for him were:

- Getting the balance right with the maintenance plus (M+) at the feed barrier to create enough need for visits. If is not a guided system (feed first or milk first and require cows to pass through the milking robot before they can then access feed or other areas), I like to have 10 litres of yield, at least, coming from the robot. For example, for a 30-litre herd average, I would like the diet from the feed fence to be no more than M+20 litres. The more times the cows visit the robot, the greater the potential of earning you more money.
- ‘Prevention rather than cure’ It takes longer to fix a problem than prevent it ever happening, so doing some daily maintenance checks reduces downtime (which restricts milking time) and helps prevent those midnight phone calls.

- Understand your cows and their pecking order, think back to when you were at primary school because that’s what herd behaviour is like. You have those new starters i.e., your heifers that don’t know who they can sit beside yet and who is going to bully them, it’s a scary place for them! Make it easy for them by ensuring there are no dead ends where they might meet a bully, and enough cubicles so they can choose somewhere safe to lie down. Cows waiting for the robot is like when you were queuing up for lunch at school. If a bully kept pushing you back, you would avoid going for lunch. However, when the bullies get bored and go away, leaving free access to the robot, it seems much more appealing to wait to go in! Make sure you collect late cows at different times of the day, so they don’t get used to you helping them out and waiting for you to collect them. Make their life as easy as possible to achieve their full potential. You can put some of your more timid heifers on free access to the robot so that if they do try to go through, they might not get milked, but they are still rewarded with cake. How disheartening would it be to pluck up the courage to go through the robot only to get kicked out with no cake?!

I also asked John why more people haven’t moved to robots, and he replied “Because robots aren’t for everyone, it’s an investment and a big decision to make for any business. In my opinion, it’s not the answer to not wanting to milk cows.”

“Think of your dairy herd as a football team, you have the best players in your team and every single player deserves a spot”

CMC FARM HACK

We are fortunate to visit lots of your farms and, on our travels, we frequently come across FARM HACKS - amazingly simple (but effective) ways that you have designed to overcome everyday challenges.

Our very first farm hack was spotted on a farm in Gloucestershire to keep rock salt in front of the milking herd (providing it is kept topped up!) all the time.

We would love to see more of your innovative ideas, so please send them to: cmc@creditmilling.co.uk along with your name and location and these can be a regular way of sharing some top tips amongst our brilliant industry!



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