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## The real story for livestock farmers

Soil management is often overlooked in favour of more immediate concerns like animal health and feed supply. There seems to be a misconception that the soil will grow crops regardless how its farmed.

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# TOMORROW'S FARMER



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YOUR NEWSLETTER FROM CREDITON MILLING COMPANY

## Controlling the controllables...

**Well, what a strange weather year this is turning out to be?! Some of you are saying that you have had one of your best grass years and others of you are saying that the rain never seems to have stopped falling from the sky?! One of the main reasons that we all love agriculture is that no two days, seasons or farms are the same. At a time where we are seeing fluctuating markets, challenging harvesting windows, high costs, what can we hope to achieve by 'controlling the controllables'?**

DAIRY

Although weather is a key influencing factor on grass availability, crop establishment/growth and farmer mood, there is absolutely nothing that any of us can do about it! There are, however, some simple things that we can all do for our animals to ensure that they remain as healthy, happy and productive as possible.

AHDB reported that GB milk deliveries totalled 991 million litres in August, a decrease of 0.5% compared to last year. Daily deliveries averaged 31.9 million litres per day. Production for this year's milk season so far (April-Aug) stands at 5,258 million litres, back 0.9% compared to the same period of the year before.

With milk supply tightening due to lower-than-forecasted milk yields and talk of milk prices increasing, we need to give our cows the correct nutrition now to ensure that they continue to deliver the litres (at the desired milk quality) to capitalise on potentially stronger milk prices.

### Some important factors to consider:

#### Are we being realistic about the quantity of fresh grass available to your cows?

Grass growth rate has been extremely variable this season (you don't need us to tell you that!), making the situation extremely challenging. With winter months approaching rapidly, some of you may be

feeling cautious about forage supplies, following a very variable grass growing season and mixed reports regarding silage quality. Fresh grass DM% is lower than you might think (around 15-18%DM) and with daylight hours reducing, we need to be prioritising the cow and what she is realistically able to eat.

#### Are you ensuring the cows are receiving enough high-quality feed to support the desired level of milk production?

We appreciate that costs will be front of mind for all of you and the urge to resist the demands of a full winter routine for as long as possible are tempting, but please consider the following:

- Quantity and quality of buffer being provided, how much time have cows got to eat it?
- Think about access and space at troughs/feed fence especially for freshly calved cows, heifers and more subordinate animals.
- Clean troughs out more frequently to avoid heating and/or mouldy feed contaminating fresh feed.

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DAIRY

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BEEF & SHEEP

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# Controlling the controllables... *continued from page 1*

- Consider the amount of time spent in collecting yards.
- Think about clamp management – are you able to move across the face quicker to prevent heating? Is the shear grab sharp to achieve a clean cut at the face?

## Do the cows have enough access to fresh, clean water?

- The unsung hero, the often-forgotten nutrient – a 40-litre cow can drink up to 200 litres of water a day. After all, milk is about 87% water!
- Do you have enough water troughs?
- What is your water pressure like? Can it cope with the number of cows per trough and high demand periods such as straight after milking?
- Are the water troughs clean and fresh, is there a biofilm?
- Observe cows drinking, are they glugging or licking from the top of the trough? Do you see cows going for the freshest water near the ball valve?

## How are your forage stocks looking (appreciating that you may not know for maize harvest yet)?

- Is the first cut disappearing quicker than you had hoped?
- Is 2023 maize all but gone?
- Please involve us in the conversation early, we may be able to help extend forage stocks a little or look at some alternative options.

## Remember the young ones?

When times get tough, there is often a temptation to keep youngstock tight.



Please be mindful that these are the future profit generators of your farming business. We need to ensure that they receive the correct nutrient supply for their age and stage to support growth, development and fertility so that they can get (and hold) in calf and seamlessly enter the herd in the future.

## Always think about dry and transition cows!

Although the nutrient demands of our heavily pregnant girls are nothing like that of our early lactation ladies, we need to provide them with the right amount of all the nutrients, we all need a stress-free calving and successful transition into milk, to hit the required peak yield for your herd.

## What are the cows telling us?

- Dry matter intakes – are they staying the same or are they a bit variable?

- Rumen fill (guide to what cows have eaten in last 4 – 6 hours)
- Body Condition Score (more of a longer-term indication of nutrition, are you measuring this? If not, we can help!)
- Dung consistency
- Bulk tank milks and milk quality
- Fertility

Who knows what the winter has in store for all of us but please do give us a shout, we are on hand to help and support and can hopefully provide some valuable guidance to assist you with some of the factors within your control.



**DR KAREN WONNACOTT**  
07783 152450  
RUMINANT NUTRITIONIST

# The real story for livestock farmers

## Focus: Improving Soil Management

**For livestock farmers, soil management is often overlooked in favour of more immediate concerns like animal health and feed supply. There seems to be a misconception that the soil will grow crops regardless how its farmed.**

**FORAGE**

However, the benefits of improved soil management are significant and can directly impact yield and quality of forage crops whilst also aiding livestock productivity and farm profitability. Here's the key benefits and some simple steps you can take to enhance your soil management practices.

## Improved forage quality and quantity

Healthy soils produce more nutritious and abundant forage, directly benefiting livestock health and growth. Well-managed soils support diverse and resilient grass that can sustain livestock even during the more common extremes of weather we are seeing.



**MARK TUCKER 07703734530**  
FORAGE SPECIALIST

## Reduced feed costs

By improving soil health and grassland productivity, farmers can reduce their reliance on purchased feed. This not only cuts costs but also ensures a more consistent and reliable food source for livestock.

## Enhanced animal health

Better forage quality leads to improved animal nutrition, which boosts immunity and overall health. Healthier animals are less prone to diseases, reducing veterinary costs and improving productivity. *Cont.*

### Environmental benefits

Sustainable soil management practices reduce erosion, improve water quality, and increase soil carbon sequestration. These practices contribute to a healthier environment and more resilient farming systems.

### Simple steps

#### 1. Regular soil testing

Conduct soil tests to understand the grassland. Looking not only at the chemical status of your soils but examining the Biological and Physical aspects as well. Use the results to make informed decisions about treatment and approach. Aiming for 20% of your farm every year is a good target to have, problem fields should also be a priority.

#### 2. Rotational grazing

Implement rotational grazing to prevent overgrazing and allow grassland to recover. This practice improves grass growth, increases soil organic matter,

and reduces soil compaction. Pre mowing can also be an option on third rotations to increase DM intake and or re set paddocks to the optimum covers.

#### 3. Incorporate organic matter

Add compost, manure, or green manures to enhance soil fertility and structure. Organic matter improves water retention and nutrient availability, supporting healthier forage growth. However, targeting through soil results is a must.

#### 4. Improve biodiversity (plant mores species)

Introduce a mix of grasses and legumes. Legumes, such as clover, fix nitrogen, enriching the soil naturally. Diverse Grassland also support a variety of root structures, improving soil health and resilience.

#### 5. Manage soil compaction.

Prevent soil compaction by avoiding overstocking and managing livestock

access. Use controlled traffic patterns and mechanical aeration if necessary to alleviate compaction and improve soil structure.

#### 6. Use cover crops

Plant cover crops during off-seasons to protect soil from erosion, suppress weeds, and add organic matter. Cover crops like ryegrass or clover can also fix nitrogen and improve soil fertility. These crops can also play a vital role in increasing forage stocks for a relatively cheap investment and can be part of a targeted SFI plan that isn't designed to drive down production.

Improving soil management is a crucial yet often underappreciated aspect of livestock farming. Embracing these soil management strategies not only benefits the farm's productivity and profitability but also contributes to the long-term health of the environment.



## Is Flushing an old-fashioned approach?

Flushing ewes, which involves increasing their feed before and during tugging to improve ovulation, has been a common practice for many years. However, with advancements in sheep management, grazing strategies, and modern techniques like sponging, using teaser rams, and selecting fertile tups, flushing may be becoming less necessary.

Despite these changes, monitoring and managing a ewe's body condition score (BCS) throughout the year is still essential. Keeping ewes in the right condition at key times, such as tugging and lambing, can greatly impact the productivity and profitability of the flock.

BCS is measured on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very thin and 5 being very fat, and regular checks can help avoid costly interventions later on.

The reproductive cycle for a ewe begins shortly after lambs are weaned. While it might be easy to overlook ewes during

this period, it is crucial for rebuilding their condition after lactation and setting them up for a successful tugging season. Gaining one BCS can take a month or more, requiring 9-20 extra MJ of energy per day. Leaving condition management until tugging is too late.

Ewes should have a BCS of 2.5-3 at tugging to ensure they are in the best shape for reproduction. If the BCS is below 2, their ovulation rates can be significantly reduced, leading to fewer lambs. Before lambing, a BCS of 3-3.5 is recommended, allowing for the natural loss of around 0.5 BCS as the ewe starts lactation, when her energy needs increase dramatically.

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# Focus on shell quality

Egg shell quality is mostly influenced before the egg is laid. The thickness of the shell is directly related to the time the egg spends in the shell gland—generally, the longer it remains in the gland, the thicker the shell will be. This means that eggs laid earlier in the day tend to have thicker shells compared to those laid later.

**POULTRY** Egg shell quality is mostly influenced before the egg is laid. The thickness of the shell is directly related to the time the egg spends in the shell gland—generally, the longer it remains in the gland, the thicker the shell will be. This means that eggs laid earlier in the day tend to have thicker shells compared to those laid later.

Calcium deposition also plays a key role in determining shell quality. If a hen's diet provides adequate calcium and it is properly absorbed, the shell will be strong and well-formed. Darker-shelled eggs tend to have better shell quality than lighter ones. This difference may be linked to the health of the birds—hens that are unwell use nutrients to maintain their health rather than for producing robust eggs. Excess sunlight can also result in pale eggs, though the exact reason why too much sunlight affects shell pigmentation is not well understood.

Disease can also have a significant impact on shell quality. Infectious

Bronchitis (IB) is a common cause, often resulting in rough, discoloured, or wrinkled shells. IB affects the entire reproductive tract, including the shell gland, leading to misshapen eggs and watery egg whites. Two to five days after exposure to IB, hens may start producing pale eggs as the virus disrupts normal pigmentation.

Good management practices, especially around nutrition and lighting, are essential for maintaining shell quality. There is a direct relationship between egg size and shell thickness: the bigger the egg, the thinner the shell. This is why it's important to control egg size, even though larger eggs are in high demand. Extending daylight hours slowly helps hens mature properly before laying, which helps prevent oversized eggs. Regular egg weighing and adjusting diets accordingly can also help, and CMC can support producers with these practices.

Shell quality naturally declines as hens age. After 40 weeks, hens lose some



of their ability to mobilise calcium from their bones, which reduces the production of calcium carbonate needed for forming shells.

Stress also negatively affects shell quality. When hens are under stress, they produce acidic secretions that damage cells lining the oviduct and uterus, resulting in thin or misshapen shells. In extreme cases, calcium deposits may appear on the shell surface.

Overall, maintaining good shell quality is crucial for successful egg production, as poor-quality shells can lead to financial losses. Careful management of diet, health, and environmental factors is key to ensuring hens produce consistently high-quality shells.



**WILL WHITE 07545 504138**  
POULTRY SPECIALIST

## Is Flushing an old-fashioned approach?

There is some evidence to suggest that a small drop in condition during late pregnancy can promote placental growth and improve lambs' ability to thrive after birth. However, this needs to be carefully managed to avoid any negative effects on lamb development.

Mineral levels in ewes can also influence fertility and lamb growth. Important minerals like iodine, selenium, vitamin E, and cobalt support reproduction and lamb health. Testing ewes, forage, and soils helps build a clear picture of your farm's mineral status, ensuring the right amount of supplementation is provided. This avoids unnecessary expenses and improves lamb vigour, immune function, and growth rates.

Effective grazing management is key to maintaining ewes' body condition and mineral supply. Grass should be the main source of feed, and prioritising quality grazing for ewes with lower BCS helps them rebuild condition. Creating a feed budget and managing paddocks to ensure consistent nutrition throughout tugging and pregnancy will keep ewes in good shape and increase overall flock efficiency.

Maintaining the ewes condition before weaning is as important, I have seen scanning figures down for autumn lambing flocks this year and most are putting this down to the horrible spring taking more out of the ewes than farmers have realised and therefore not being in a good enough condition score before the rams went in.

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Every year it is good practice to check ewes and rams for internal parasites (even if you wouldn't normally). This year worms in adult sheep seems to be more prevalent than expected. Another gathering to take a fec sample/worm and check BCS with hands on is always good as wool can hide the reality and possibly cause problems later on.

While modern techniques may reduce the need for flushing, careful management of BCS, grazing, and minerals remains essential for ensuring the health and productivity of both ewes and lambs.



**DAVE SMALL 07711 780858**  
POULTRY SPECIALIST