

Grazing & Livestock Management Over Winter

July 2022

Managing your cattle herd and sheep flock can be challenging at times, there are a lot of management decisions to be made, many of which are time sensitive. Couple those management decisions with climatic conditions, pest and disease control and you may find yourself chasing your tail more often than not. This is especially true at the moment, as the weather can be tough to manage at the best of times, throw in the season we're having and its feeling like an uphill battle.

With winter upon us, **pasture quality** becomes a priority. Wet, cold conditions have not been the ideal start to winter, with delays to winter sowing and pasture growth rates slowed. An abundance of summer dry stand feed has also hampered the efforts of our reliable winter feed such as clover and rye grass, getting a good start. Feed testing across the district is showing that although there appears to be good feed sitting in paddocks and plenty of it, the quality of this feed is not matching the nutritional requirements of livestock. There are several explanations for the current condition of our pastures, predominantly the rate of growth, constant wet weather and cold conditions coupled with the price/availability of fertiliser has meant that the feed is falling short nutritionally of where it needs to be to maintain production.

As our pastures don't seem to be meeting nutritional requirements at present, it is advised that you consider some form of **supplementary feeding** to boost your livestock's health and condition. During pregnancy and lactation the energy demands of our livestock fluctuates as shown in the table below. Demand for energy increases during gestation, peaking during early lactation. This demand steadily decreases from mid to late lactation as the offspring begin to pick at feed on offer, reducing the pressure on the mother. It is important to know the stage of reproduction you are accommodating for, to help determine just how much feed they need to be consuming and whether or not there is enough feed sitting in the paddock for them.

During stints of cold weather livestock require additional nutrition to assist in, keeping them warm and maintaining production. Once we start noticing livestock condition slipping, we are already on the back foot, so preparation is key. This is not only true for our pregnant & lactating livestock but also our young and growing livestock.

It's worth getting out in the paddock now and having a look at what you've got and determining whether you need to consider doing some pasture maintenance or

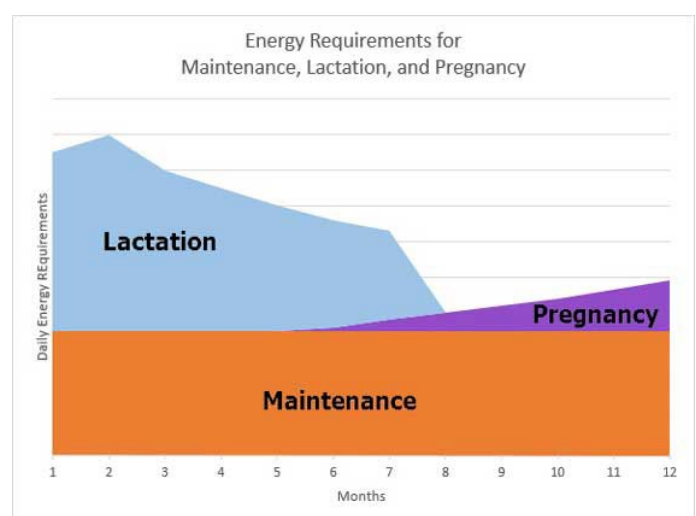


Fig 1. Cattle Energy Requirements, *Credit: grass-fed-solutions.com*

implementing your winter supplementary feeding program early to maximise livestock productivity. Pasture assessment and feed testing is the quickest way to check on your pasture health. If you have not done pasture testing before, please give us a call to have a chat about how you can implement this into your current management program to monitor changes in pasture health and jump on any inadequacies early.

Feed budgeting for the winter period is a good starting point and best done as early as possible to allow you to prepare should you need to make adjustments in your management to meet critical nutritional requirements in a timely fashion. Calculate your feed requirement for a reasonable period and be certain that you have enough access to feed to get you through this period. Be vigilant on the changing energy requirements of the livestock that you are feeding. Set yourself critical dates to reassess how things are tracking so that you don't find yourself caught short for feed. Low quality hay, silage or pasture will require additional energy and protein to meet the nutritional requirements of livestock.

Always introduce a new feed slowly (applies to pasture, crop and supplementary feed), provide a good source of roughage (hay, straw or dry stand feed) and when supplementary feeding shandy feeds between batches even when it is the same product.

Feeding & Managing Livestock Over Winter

- Be vigilant on the changing energy requirements of your pregnant, lactating, young and growing livestock.
- Feed budgeting is an essential tool to assist you in making timely livestock feed management decisions and prepare you for seasonal feed shortages.
- Calculate your feed requirement for the winter period and be certain that you have enough access to feed to get you through what is shaping up to be a tough season.
- Feed gaps are common during winter, that is, demand for feed outweighs pasture quality and growth rate. To reduce the impact of this gap some form of supplementary feeding is required.
- The quality of hay and feed in general is variable, there is some good quality hay on the market, but a wet hay making season has resulted in higher volumes of water damaged hay hitting the market. Feed testing is advised. Stressed or failed crops turned into hay could potentially pose nitrate or prussic acid concerns and levels should be checked before feeding.
- Low quality hay or silage will not maintain production, to avoid livestock losing condition feed additional energy and protein to meet livestock requirements.
- Ensure your drenching and vaccination program is up to date;
 - it has been a difficult autumn with high parasite burdens in all grazing animals, spring will be similar prepare low worm weaning pastures now.
 - Pasture profiles change with climatic conditions and the introduction of supplementary feed can predispose animals to diseases such as Pulpy Kidney, this component of the 5 in 1

vaccine only protects animals for 3 months, so vaccinate regularly or when feed type or quality changes.

- Provide booster vaccination 4 to 6 weeks prior to lambing/calving to boost passive immunity to newborn through colostrum.
 - Provide shelter from harsh weather conditions, livestock use more energy in cold weather to keep themselves warm.
 - Monitor your pregnant livestock regularly to ensure that you pick up on any health and welfare issues early, allowing you to lessen the impact they may have on productivity.
-

© State of New South Wales through Regional NSW 2022. You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the Regional NSW as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to charge others for access to the publication (other than at cost); include the publication in advertising or a product for sale; modify the publication; or republish the publication on a website. You may freely link to the publication on a departmental website.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (July 2022) and may not be accurate, current or complete. The State of New South Wales (including the Regional NSW), the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.