

Great pasture takes more than day to day decisions. Yes, they're always important. But if they're not aligned with a high level strategies of your farm system, you (and your animals) will miss out on the best your pasture could be.

### **First principles**

Underlying everything is the need to match feed demand (animal requirements) with feed supply (pasture and crops). Pasture is the main part of this very dynamic relationship. But you can pull other 'levers' to help create the right balance for your system, yearround.

## What's your demand

This is the easier side of the formula. You can predict how much feed you need in the season ahead, with reasonable accuracy.

What class(es) of animal you run, what breed(s) you prefer, your stocking rate, calving and lambing dates – these all create seasonal feed demand on your farm.

Daily milking cow feed requirements: kg DM/cow/day at 12.0 MJ ME/kg DM

Breed	Kg Lwt	kg MS / cow / day						
		1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.4	2.5
J	375	12.5	13.7	14.9				
J	400	12.6	13.9	15.1	16.3			
JxF	450	13.3	15.2	16.5	17.8	19.1		
Fr	500	13.9	15.2	16.5	17.8	19.1	20.7	
Fr	550	14.3	15.6	16.9	18.2	19.5	21.1	21.7

(Source: DairyNZ Facts & Figures 2021).

# What's your supply?

Feed supply, on the other hand, can and does change

suddenly! Feed deficits are much more common and disruptive than feed surpluses, so every farm will need contingencies to offset this risk. Among the most useful are:

### Summer crops

To secure home-grown summer feed when hot, dry weather depresses pasture growth and quality. These keep your animals better-fed over summer, but that's not all. They support good pasture management, because:

- 1. You can pull paddocks out of rotation in times of surplus spring growth, to help pasture quality across the rest of the farm.
- 2. You can also prevent your animals over-grazing pastures in summer, which often compromises

persistence.

#### Winter crops

To carry a large bulk of feed into winter when grass slows down. Pasture might reach around 4 t DM/ha maximum at this time of year, but rape might be 8 t DM/ha, kale 15 t DM/ha and fodder beet over 20 t DM/ha.

### Silage/hay

For extra feed during deficits. Harvest these from surplus pasture, and you maintain high quality grass at the same time.

Silage and hay have two big benefits compared to crops – you can store and use them as needed; and you always know how much you have on hand.

Imported supplements

Include PKE, grain, baleage or hay. Typically your most expensive option, but can be very helpful in severe feed deficits.

# How flexible are you?

Flexible farm systems help you balance the feed demand side of the equation in erratic weather, particularly dry summers. Key strategies include:

### Trading stock

Having many animals that can be bought or sold at any time in response to the weather is a real strength for

many farmers. Quitting trading stock heading into a dry summer to ease feed demand is a common example.

### Farm to the season, not the calendar

For a sheep farmer, this could mean early weaning, or selling lambs store instead of finishing them. For a dairy farmer, examples include OAD milking, selling culls or drying off cows early.

### Nitrogen boost

Nitrogen fertiliser can provide an economic boost in pasture growth when needed.

# Management

For more on managing drought, see Preparing for drought, or Responding to flood for more on recovering from flood.



You can pull many levers in your system to help balance feed demand vs supply.

#### Better pasture together™

