AGRICULTURE

NEWSLETTER

Autumn and Winter 2026/2027

EXCEPTIONAL FIRST-CUT SILAGE

How it will shape your winter feeding

HOW YEAST IS DRIVING DLWG, HEALTH, FERTILITY

Reduce days to slaughter and killout weight

DRIVING FLOCK PERFORMANCE THIS AUTUMN

Maximising nutrition during pregnancy

Edition 1
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Supporting Rumen Health for Stronger Milk Production this Autumn

by Abbey Firman, NWF Sales Specialist

Following a summer where many farms have experienced prolonged dry conditions, attention is now turning to the quality and consistency of late-season grazing. While recent rainfall may have encouraged grass growth, stressed pastures can present nutritional challenges, including lower digestibility, increased fibre levels and variable nutrient supply. Understanding how these changes affect rumen function is key to maintaining performance through autumn and preparing cows for winter. Generally, as dry matter intakes reduce in late summer, rumen efficiency and forage digestibility can also decline. So, at a time when grazing quality is past its peak, what can we do to support the rumen and set ourselves up for a strong winter?

In fields affected by summer drought, grazing quality can be particularly variable. Grass may be more mature and fibrous than normal, with elevated NDF levels and reduced digestibility. Even where rain has stimulated fresh growth, cows may be grazing a mixture of older stemmy material and lush regrowth, creating inconsistency in nutrient supply. When forage quality becomes less predictable, maximising nutrient utilisation from every kilogram of dry matter becomes increasingly important. Utilising as much of the energy available as possible is important to maintaining milk yield and body condition in late summer. One tried and tested solution to this is a live yeast, such as Yea-Sacc®.

Live yeasts are proven to help degrade fibre in the rumen. One mechanism of this is oxygen scavenging, where the yeast cells consume residual oxygen and establish strict anaerobic conditions. These conditions are then perfect for fibre-digesting bacteria to break down the plant cell walls and produce acetate. This enhanced production of acetate is ideal for late summer, as acetate supports healthy recovery of butterfat levels at a time of year when they are often depressed. This mechanism shows how feeding live yeast can not only help with butterfat production, but also produce a healthier, more optimal rumen. Research conducted by Alltech has demonstrated milk yield improvements of approximately **0.5 litres per cow per day** under certain feeding conditions.

Along with feeding a yeast, NWF have developed multi-purpose Farm Paks to provide the perfect cocktail of supplements needed within the herd, combined into one cost-effective solution. An example of this, which is perfect for late-season grazing is the NWF Healthy Rumen Farm Pak. This Pak combines a live yeast with a buffer to give tailored support to the rumen of grazing dairy cows. Already containing the benefits of a live yeast, the rumen buffer also helps control pH challenges. Fluctuating rumen pH can be a challenge in late summer due to inconsistent pastures which can cause unbalanced acid loading on the rumen. This often happens when pastures are stemmier, burnt off or undergo rapid sugar shifts due to weather changes. The combined effect that yeast and rumen buffer have on digestibility and pH stabilisation makes it the perfect supplement to feed to late grazing herds.

In summary, supporting the rumen during the late grazing season is essential to maintain milk yields and body condition, ensuring cows come inside in peak condition and ready to perform throughout the winter. Failure to do so can lead to milk losses, reduced butterfat levels and declining body condition as nutrient absorption becomes less efficient and intakes fall. Following a difficult growing season, maintaining body condition and milk solids through autumn is particularly important. Any loss in condition now can be difficult and costly to recover once cows are housed.

Speak to your local NWF sales specialist to discuss the solutions available for your system and how targeted rumen support can help maintain performance, protect body condition and set your herd up for a productive winter.

Exceptional First-Cut Silage Set to Shape Winter Feeding

by Paul Mardell, NWF Technical Development Manager

With second and third cuts now in the clamp on many farms, attention is beginning to turn towards winter feeding strategies. Analysis of more than 300 first-cut silage samples at the NWF Agriculture laboratory suggests 2026 could be remembered as one of the strongest forage years seen for some time, with quality showing a marked improvement on recent seasons.

This year's first-cut silages are showing a clear improvement compared with first cuts from 2025, reversing the five-year trend of declining silage quality. This improvement in quality has been driven by favourable winter and spring growing conditions, although some regions experienced a drier spring than in 2025.

The main driver behind this improvement is that we have seen silage cut slightly earlier this year, which has meant the grass has been leafier, less mature, lower in fibre and higher in digestibility. The weather conditions have allowed some farms to cut and wilt at the optimum growth stage of the grass, giving an increase in sugar, rapidly fermentable carbohydrate (RFC), ME, with lower fibre and NDF values.

This improvement in quality will give the farmers an opportunity to include forage at higher levels within the rations, driving milk from forage with increased forage dry matter intakes. This could also give the potential to reduce purchased feed and improve feed conversion efficiency. There will, however, be a greater requirement for effective fibre and NDF sources, such as straw and fibrous straight feeds, to help balance rations.

Based on results to date, first-cut silage quality is looking exceptional for 2026. This itself will bring some challenges for winter 2026/27. Rumen health will be critical this winter. Lower fibre and NDF levels, combined with higher fermentability, will increase the risk of ruminal acid loading. Without sufficient effective fibre in the diet, the risk of digestive upsets and reduced performance will increase. To help combat this, ensure there is enough effective fibre to give the ration some structure. Higher RFC and increased protein in silage should help maintain rumen balance; starch levels will need to be reviewed carefully, along with an increased requirement for by-pass protein. Particular attention should be paid to transition and freshly calved cows. While high-quality silage can support intakes and performance, excessive levels of rapidly fermentable carbohydrate may increase the risk of rumen instability in more vulnerable groups. Monitoring dung consistency, rumination and feed intakes will remain important throughout the winter.

The higher dry matter silage, combined with higher sugar, will give the silage an increased intake potential but can also lead to increased risk of heating and aerobic spoilage. Careful clamp management, including maintaining a clean face and progressing quickly across the clamp, can help minimise spoilage. At the feed fence, avoiding overfeeding and regularly removing refusals will further reduce heating losses and support feed intakes. Careful management at the feed fence will also be required, not overfeeding and regular removal of feed refusals will reduce waste and heating, which can lead to lower dry matter intakes.

Better silage this year should give some real performance gains if diets are carefully balanced. Ensure fermentable energy and effective fibre are balanced and avoid pushing high levels of fast fermentable starch into high yielders.

At the start of the feeding period and whenever there is a diet change, careful monitoring will be required. While the overall trend points towards an excellent first-cut crop, significant variation will still exist between farms, fields and individual clamps. Dry matter, protein, starch and fibre levels should never be assumed. A current forage analysis remains one of the most valuable tools when balancing winter diets, helping identify opportunities to improve performance whilst avoiding costly nutritional mistakes.

Check cows regularly for cud chewing rates, rumen fill, dung consistency, and milk butterfat; these are all indicators of rumen health. Monitor intakes and adjust as required. Most importantly, carry out regular forage analysis throughout the feeding period and use the results to review ration performance. By closely monitoring forage quality and cow response, you can maximise the value of what appears to be one of the highest-quality first-cut silage crops seen in recent years.

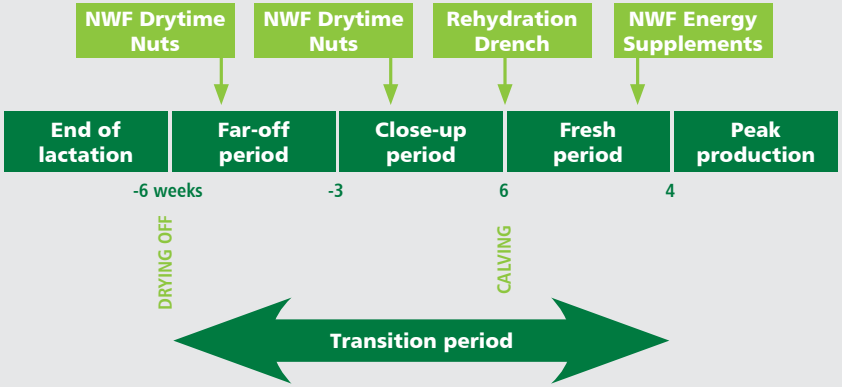
Getting Transition Cows Right This Winter

by Adam Clay, NWF Operations and Technical Director

With milk prices coming under pressure and margins tightening on many farms, attention is increasingly turning to efficiency. One of the biggest opportunities to improve performance often starts before a cow enters the milking herd.

The transition period, covering the weeks before and after calving, can have a major influence on milk yield, fertility and health throughout lactation. Getting this period right helps cows achieve their potential while reducing the risk of costly setbacks later on.

Following a summer that has challenged forage production on some farms, now is a good time to review transition cow diets and ensure plans are in place ahead of housing. With forage quality and availability likely to vary considerably between farms this winter, understanding exactly what's in front of the cow will be key.



Key priorities for transition cows this winter

Body condition score

The ideal calving condition score is 3 – 3.25; calving thinner will reduce lactation and peak yield, and calving overweight will reduce early dry matter intakes and increase chances of milk fever and ketosis. For cows calving overweight, consideration should be given to additional post-calving support, as these animals are generally at greater risk of metabolic challenges during early lactation.

Nutrition

High dry matter intakes will help to keep the rumen expanded and drive intakes post calving, but high energy intakes will drive dangerous weight gain. Maximising dry matter intake before calving remains one of the best ways of supporting cows after calving. Dry cow forages should be clean, fresh and palatable, while avoiding excessive energy intake that can lead to over-conditioning. Chopped straw can be a useful tool for maintaining rumen fill and controlling dietary energy levels. If straw is used it must be chopped to approximately 2cm to enable intakes of 3- 5 kg. With forage quality varying more than usual this year, analysing dry cow forage before balancing rations is strongly recommended.

Minerals

Mineral management remains a key part of successful transition cow nutrition. Particular attention should be paid to potassium levels within forage, as elevated potassium can interfere with calcium metabolism and increase the risk of milk fever. Forage analysis can help identify potential issues before they become costly. Supplementary magnesium and, where appropriate, DCAB products can help support a smoother transition into lactation.

Monitor and react

Speak to your NWF sales specialist as soon as symptoms show, small changes can have big effects. For example, a change of silage could shift the potassium levels, if retained cleansings increase, this can be a sign of subclinical milk fever, so increasing magnesium can help. Low colostrum levels could be lower starch in the close up group or an impact of milk fever. Reacting to such symptoms could pay dividends through lactation.

While every farm faces different challenges, the fundamentals of transition cow management remain the same. Good forage, balanced nutrition, effective mineral supplementation and close attention to fresh cows can all help support a successful start to lactation.

As margins come under pressure, the herds that perform best this winter are likely to be those that focus on getting the basics right before calving rather than dealing with problems afterwards.

Could Your Soil Be Holding Back Herd Performance?

by Amelia Lewandowska, NWF Sales Specialist

Across the UK, soil mineral balance can significantly affect livestock performance. High molybdenum rarely affects grass growth but can reduce copper availability in the rumen. When molybdenum combines with sulphur, compounds called thiomolybdates are formed, preventing livestock from absorbing copper effectively even when forage levels are adequate.

Why Somerset Became the Best-Known Example

Elevated molybdenum levels can occur in many parts of the UK, but the Somerset Levels became one of the first areas where the link between soil minerals and livestock performance was clearly identified. The region's marine sediments and alkaline soils increase the availability of molybdenum to pasture plants. Although most closely associated with Somerset, elevated molybdenum levels are not unique to the region. Similar imbalances can occur across the UK, making mineral testing important for all grazing systems.

Copper plays a vital role in energy metabolism, immunity and reproduction. Reduced copper availability can result in:

- Lower milk yield and milk solids
- Poorer fertility and conception rates
- Increased days open
- Reduced immune function and disease resistance

In grazing herds, cows turned onto high-molybdenum pastures may develop diarrhoea within days, with subsequent losses in body condition and milk production if the mineral imbalance is not corrected.

Managing the Risk

Successful management often includes:

- Soil and forage mineral analysis
- Monitoring copper status through blood or liver testing
- Targeted supplementation under veterinary guidance
- Consideration of sulphur levels in feed and water

Blanket copper supplementation is not recommended, especially where sheep are present, due to toxicity risks.

Field Sampling Reveals a Wider Pattern

To better understand the extent of molybdenum across the region, NWF Agriculture undertook a field survey, collecting soil samples from a range of locations across Somerset and the surrounding areas.

While not a formal scientific study, the results were striking. Every sample returned elevated molybdenum levels, reinforcing the need to understand the mineral profile of their own soils rather than assuming the issue is confined to traditional disease areas.

The findings reinforce practical observations that cattle and sheep can experience copper-related health and performance issues even where forage appears plentiful and pasture management is otherwise sound. Where molybdenum levels are elevated, the interaction between molybdenum, sulphur and copper should be considered before assuming animals are receiving adequate trace minerals.

For livestock enterprises, particularly dairy herds, where fertility, milk yield and immune function are closely linked to trace element status, understanding the mineral profile of individual fields can provide valuable information when working with veterinarians and nutritionists to develop an appropriate supplementation strategy.

Rather than treating copper deficiency as solely an animal health issue, these findings suggest that the starting point should often be the soil itself.

From Soil Analysis to Herd Performance

Rather than simply increasing copper supplementation, the focus has been on understanding the relationship between molybdenum, sulphur and copper, and developing a balanced nutritional strategy tailored to each farm.

NWF Agriculture has seen encouraging improvements on farms where targeted nutritional changes have been implemented. Farmers have reported improved fertility, conception rates, transition cow health, milk yield and milk solids, with fewer signs of copper imbalance. Many have also noted healthier coats, improved body condition and greater overall herd consistency.

While many factors influence livestock performance; including genetics, forage quality, housing, management and overall herd health, the experience on these farms has reinforced the importance of considering soil and forage mineral status as part of the wider nutritional picture. Addressing copper–molybdenum imbalances has become another valuable management tool for improving herd performance.

Case Study: Improvements in Herd Fertility

Following soil and forage analysis, elevated molybdenum levels were identified as a likely factor affecting copper availability within one dairy herd. After changes to the mineral nutrition programme, average days in milk reduced from 415 to 356, alongside improvements in fertility and conception rates. While no single management change can be credited with all of these gains, the results highlight the value of investigating mineral imbalances when herd performance falls below expectations.

A Continuing Challenge

Despite decades of research, molybdenum-related copper deficiency remains an important consideration for livestock producers across the UK. When fertility, production or animal health are underperforming, the answer may lie beneath the pasture rather than in the ration alone.

Please scan QR code for further information on soil and mineral analysis services, or speak to your local NWF sales specialist.

NWF Dairy Diets

Dairy Cows, especially high yielding herds, require precise feeding to support milk production, calving and health. The NWF sales team will work with you and your herd to maximise performance through quality nutrition and technical services to allow for support an efficient and sustainable herd.

NWF Rearer Feeds	A comprehensive range of rearer feeds are available to suit any age of youngstock, available as pellets, nuts or blends. The diets support growth from an early age and support rumen development, which is vital for their future performance.
NWF Dry Cow Feeds	NWF Drytime is a comprehensive dry cow ration which contains ReaShure Protected Choline which has numerous benefits for the cow and unborn calf.
NWF Dairy Feeds	A comprehensive range of dairy feeds have been specifically formulated to increase milk yields, herd health and fertility.
NWF Fusion	The NWF Fusion Dairy feed range does not contain soya, soya hulls or palm kernel and instead is formulated using **Ultra Pro-R**, a unique protected rapeseed meal to ensure the nutritional make-up is not compromised.
NWF Blends	NWF offer standard and bespoke blends formulated using a wide variety of top quality raw materials, which are then accurately blended together in our fully UFAS approved facilities.

Feeding Smarter This Winter with Molasses-Based Liquid Feeds

by Georgina Chapman, ED&F Man Nutritionist and Technical Support Manager

DAIRY

Home-grown feeds, whether forages, grass, hay or silage, or cereals, are the cheapest feedstuffs available on farm, and farmers should look to maximise their use while ensuring feed efficiency to achieve cost-effective animal production this autumn and winter. Three key pillars for making the most of home-grown feeds and increasing feed efficiency are:

- Drive dry matter intake (DMI)
- Enhance rumen function
- Improve ration digestibility

Increasing DMI can be influenced by reducing sorting behaviour, dust levels and increasing the palatability of the ration. All of these factors can be improved with the addition of a molasses based liquid feed, with research showing an average DMI increase of 1.1kg/head/day with the addition of 1.4kg liquid feed to the ration.

While often considered simply a source of sugar, molasses plays a much broader role in livestock nutrition. The highly available sugars in molasses provide an immediate energy source for rumen microbes, helping them break down fibre more efficiently and unlock more value from home-grown forages. This can be particularly important during the winter feeding period, when silage and straw-based diets rely heavily on efficient fibre digestion to support animal performance.

Secondly, a healthy rumen environment is key to making the most of forages and cereals and increasing the digestibility of feeds. When cereals are fed at high levels, this can cause the rumen pH to drop reducing feed efficiency. Research has shown that replacing a proportion of cereals with a molasses based liquid feed will help balance the energy supply without the increased risk of sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA). Therefore, the key to maximising rumen performance is to get the correct balance of all energy sources: sugar, starch and fibre.

Finally, improving the digestibility of fibre in forage is essential. Fibre has the slowest rate of energy release but can make up over 50% of the energy supply in the diet. This energy can be accessed if the rumen microbes are given the opportunity and 'fuel'. By stimulating rumen microbial activity, this can help improve the amount of fibre digested and increase total energy supply. Farm trials found that adding a molasses-based liquid feed to a ration and increasing sugar levels from 3% to 6% resulted in a 17% increase in total ration digestibility.

With an increase in use of home-grown cereals this year, it is also important to note that using a molasses-based liquid feed has additional benefits of reducing wastage and dust levels. A 5% liquid inclusion rate into a cereal-based mix can significantly reduce dust levels and improve the appearance, shine and palatability of finished feed.

With higher dry matter silages this year, there will be an increased risk of aerobic spoilage at feedout. To prevent heating and spoilage in your ration, consider using Fresh-Guard, a ration conditioner that can be added to any bulk molasses blend, proven to reduce heating and undesirable microbial activity in a ration.

ED&F MAN EST. 1783 | Liquid Products

Don’t let housing issues impact yields

by Katie Smith, NWF Ruminant Nutritionist

Maximising milk production starts with cow comfort, ensuring cows have unrestricted access to feed, water, rest and a well-managed environment.

Feed: Feed space is very important for maximising DMI.

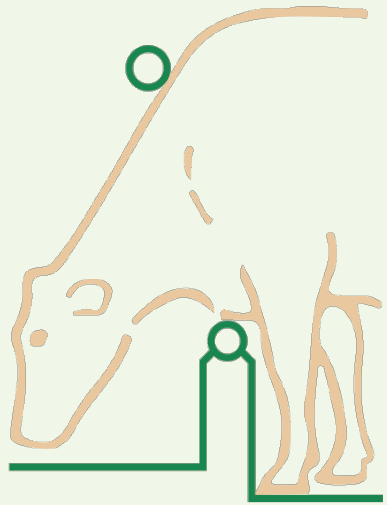
Ensuring cattle have adequate access to feed, alongside regular feed push-ups, can encourage animals back to the feed fence. This is particularly beneficial for heifers, lame cows and more timid animals when feed space is limited.

Feed barriers for lactating cows should be designed around the largest cows in the herd. As a guide, the neck rail should be positioned 125cm above floor level with a 25cm recess, the floor-to-brisket height should be 50cm, barrier width 8cm, and the distance from the brisket locator to the feed table 40cm.

Regularly pushing up feed will encourage (DMI)/forage intakes and reduce sorting of the TMR. Feed should be pushed up a minimum of six times per day and fresh feeds given twice daily, helping to reduce the risk of heating in the trough. Sufficient preparation of TMR, including forage chop length, mixing time and quality ingredients, is imperative for good palatability and increased DMI. A Holstein dairy cow will spend an average of 30-45 minutes feeding at each sitting and between 10-12 times per day, average eating for around six hours a day.

Water: Over 85% of milk is water, so accessibility to clean, fresh drinking water is paramount for high milk yield. The number of cows per trough, trough height, water depth and speed of refill are just as important. A dairy cow will consume the majority of her daily liquid intake (average 120L/day) within 60 minutes post milking, drinking for up to 30 minutes in one visit.

Housing: Good cow health is the ability to lie down in a clean, spacious, comfortable bedding area. Cubicles should be sized for the largest cows in the herd, and remember the purpose of the neck rail is to position the cow as she enters the cubicle and prevent her from standing too far forward and dunging on her bed. Positioning the neck rail too far back causes the cow to stand with her front feet on the bed and back feet in the passageway on concrete and slurry.



Adjusting the neck rail forward can improve lying times and herd performance. The optimum lying time for health and production in a 24-hour period is 14 hours. The difference between 9 hours of lying time and 14 hours is an extra litre of milk production for each extra hour, with 30% more blood circulating through the udder. Many types of bedding substrates are available, from sand/shavings to rubber matting and water beds. Whatever your bedding, all must be cleaned regularly, disinfected where possible and maintained to increase cow comfort and reduce disease risk.

Light: Lighting plays an important role in feed intake, activity and milk production. Lactating cows benefit from around 16 hours of adequate light followed by eight hours of darkness. Clean light fittings and maximising natural daylight can help encourage feeding activity and support overall herd performance.

Air: Fresh air is one of the most overlooked factors affecting cow health and performance. Poor ventilation can lead to increased humidity, heat stress and a build-up of airborne pathogens, all of which can negatively impact feed intake, milk production and overall herd health.

Good ventilation removes heat, moisture, dust and harmful gases from livestock buildings while maintaining a fresh environment. High-yielding dairy cows generate significant body heat and are particularly sensitive to poor airflow, especially during warmer months.

Signs of inadequate ventilation may include:

- Condensation on roofs and walls
- Strong ammonia odours
- Damp bedding
- Coughing within the herd
- Reduced feed intakes during warm weather

Where possible, buildings should provide unrestricted air movement through adequate inlet and outlet areas. Even modest improvements to ventilation can often result in better cow comfort, healthier lungs and improved productivity.

Even the best genetics and nutrition programme can be held back if cows are uncomfortable. Taking time to assess feed space, water availability, ventilation and cubicle design can help cows make the most of their potential and support better health, fertility and milk production.

Often, small changes to housing design or daily management routines can make a noticeable difference to intakes, lying times and overall herd performance. If cows are comfortable, they will spend more time eating, resting and producing milk.

15 The number of litres a cow can drink in a minute

60 A cow will drink most of her daily intake within 60 minutes of milking

30 The number of minutes a cow will drink in a day

120 The number of litres a 30L cow will drink in a day

NWF Beef Diets

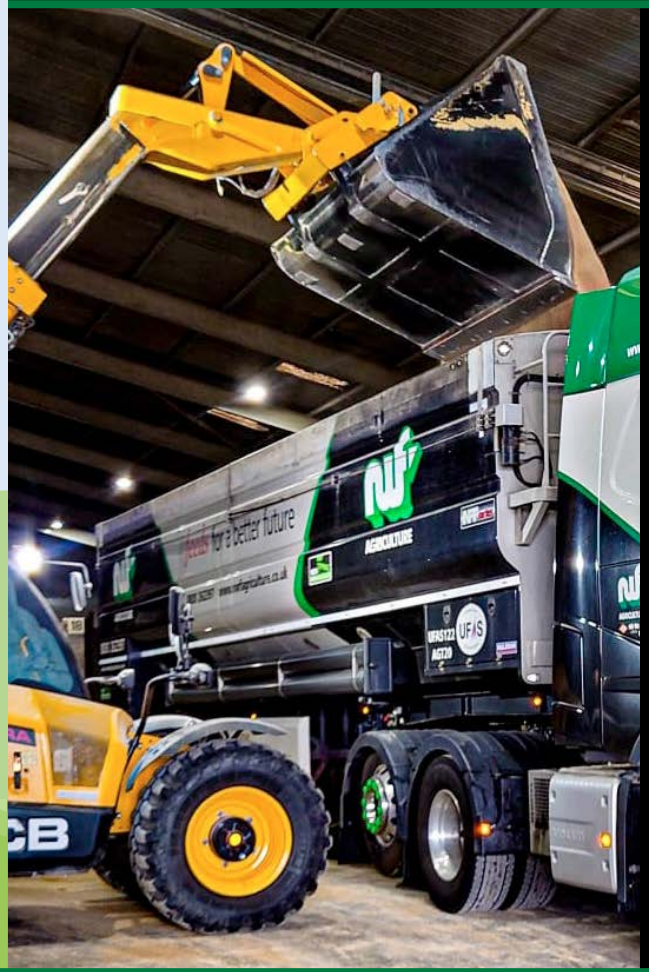
Profitable beef production depends on maximising growth rates and feed efficiency to ensure cattle are fit for the desired market. Whatever the production system, NWF Agriculture supplies a wide range of compound feed, blends, straights and feeding advice to help maximise beef performance.

Starter Feeds	A comprehensive range of feeds formulated to support early growth, rumen development and feed intake in young calves.
Rearer Feeds	A range of high-quality rearer feeds designed to promote efficient growth and development throughout the rearing period.
Grower Feeds	A balanced range of grower feeds developed to maximise frame growth and weight gain while maintaining optimal animal health. Suitable for a variety of beef production systems.
Finisher Feeds	A comprehensive range of finisher feeds formulated to maximise daily liveweight gains and achieve target finishing weights efficiently. Designed to support carcase quality and performance.
Concentrates	NWF beef concentrates are formulated using carefully selected raw materials to complement forage-based diets, providing balanced nutrition to support growth, performance and feed efficiency.

NWF Blends: Driving flexible performance from day one

In addition to the range of standard beef blends, NWF Agriculture can formulate and supply bespoke blends to suit different beef production systems. There are a number of options to consider including the addition of NWF Protected Feeds in grower and finisher blends. NWF's **Ultra Pro-R** and **Ultra Soy** supply rumen bypass proteins and create rumen space due to their efficient feed rates, allowing for **Ultra Starch-W** to then fill this space with dietary starch, increasing animal efficiency.

Greater Feed Efficiency = Greater Gains = Earlier Kill Out = More Gross Margin



- ✓ Soya
- ✓ Rapemeal
- ✓ Distillers
- ✓ Sugarbeet
- ✓ Soya Hulls
- ✓ Maize
- ✓ Wheat
- ✓ Barley
- ✓ Maize Sugar
- ✓ Wheatfeed
- ✓ PK
- ✓ Molasses
- ✓ Supplements

BESPOKE BLENDS MADE YOUR WAY

Turning Strong Beef Prices into Stronger Margins This Winter

by Rachel Tonkin, NWF Sales Specialist

With the cost of key inputs in the beef sector continuing to rise, such as cereals, fuel and straw, and lower numbers of cattle driving high demand for calves and stores, it is worth assessing your beef and youngstock systems to address any inefficiencies and maximise margins this winter. By improving cattle performance and efficiency, some costs can be mitigated.

This can be achieved by maximising daily liveweight gain, reducing days to slaughter, and ensuring that animals meet specifications for the abattoir or market. Ensuring animals' nutritional requirements are targeted and met at each stage of their lives, coupled with regular monitoring, will help ensure peak performance.

Winter often brings a few challenges. Changes in forage quality, unsettled weather, housing stress and the occasional health issue can all knock cattle off track. A small setback might not look significant at the time, but it can quickly add days to the finishing period and reduce overall margin.

Good quality forage remains the starting point. With forage stocks and quality varying from farm to farm this year, understanding what's in the clamp has never been more important. A forage analysis gives a much clearer picture of what cattle are receiving and where additional supplementation may be needed.

Getting nutrition right at each stage of growth is equally important

For younger animals, the aim is simple, keep them growing well through winter. It's a period that can influence how they perform for the rest of their lives, so any setbacks are best avoided. While forage should form the foundation of the ration, forage quality has varied considerably this year and many farms may need additional supplementation to maintain growth rates. A high-quality rearer feed can help maintain growth and ensure cattle continue to receive the energy, protein, minerals and vitamins they need and fill that energy gap during this critical period.

As cattle move into the growing phase, maintaining performance becomes the priority. Whether cattle are being fed compounds or blends alongside forage, the goal is to keep them growing consistently right through the housing period.

The simplest way to know whether that's being achieved is through regular weighing. It gives an accurate picture of daily liveweight gain and can highlight problems before they become costly. Small drops in performance are easy to miss when cattle are seen every day, but they can soon add extra days to the finishing period.

For finishing cattle, the focus turns to hitting target weights and market specifications efficiently. With beef prices where they are, there's often a temptation to keep cattle for a few extra weeks. However, it's worth keeping an eye on whether those additional days on feed are genuinely adding value or simply increasing costs.

Even with a well-formulated compound or blend, it's worth reviewing overall mineral and vitamin provision. Deficiencies aren't always obvious, but they can quietly limit growth and feed efficiency. Getting the balance right helps ensure cattle make the most of the feed in front of them.

Rumen health is another area that can sometimes be underestimated. A well functioning rumen allows cattle to utilise feed more efficiently, particularly when diets are changing at housing or concentrates are being increased. Feed additives such as live yeast can help support fibre digestion and promote more consistent performance during these periods.

Summary

While none of these factors on their own are likely to transform performance overnight, together they can make a significant difference across a group of cattle. With cattle expected to remain in short supply into 2027, the outlook for the sector remains positive. The farms that make the most of the opportunity are likely to be those that focus on the fundamentals: good forage, consistent nutrition, close attention to performance and making sure cattle keep growing from housing right through to finishing.

Beef Top Tips

- ✓ Analyse forage before housing
- ✓ Monitor growth rates regularly
- ✓ Review mineral and vitamin provision
- ✓ Avoid growth checks
- ✓ Support rumen health during ration changes

For further information on maximising DLWG, margins and herd productivity, speak to your local NWF sales specialist.

How can better feed efficiency drive better beef performance?

by Maria Agovino, Ruminant Business Manager for Europe, Alltech

In today's economic climate, beef producers are under increasing pressure to control production costs while maintaining performance. Because feed is generally by far the largest cost on-farm, monitoring feed efficiency should be a critical component of any management strategy.

Feed efficiency: A key driver of profitability

In beef cattle, feed efficiency refers to the amount of weight gained per unit of dry matter consumed. Essentially, it measures how effectively cattle convert consumed nutrients into muscle and fat. Feed efficiency is influenced by factors including the animal's stage of growth and its genetic potential, as well as the digestibility of the diet.

Monitoring feed conversion efficiency (FCE) helps identify performance trends and supports more informed feed decisions.

Rumen health: The foundation of performance

Central to feed efficiency is optimal rumen function, as it enables cattle to maximise nutrient extraction from feed. The efficiency of a beef production system relies heavily on actively managing and monitoring rumen health and nutrition effects on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

As the prices of raw materials such as corn and soy rise, maximising the use of more cost-effective, high-fibre feeds, especially home-grown forages, becomes imperative. Strategies to improve feed efficiency should incorporate high-quality forage, robust rumen health, and appropriate nutritional applications.

Forage quality

Forage, being a large component of a beef diet, varies significantly in terms of digestibility and nutrient composition. High-quality forage is more digestible, promoting better rumen health and productivity.

Maintaining adequate physically effective fibre (correct forage particle size) in the diet stimulates chewing and rumination, increases saliva secretion, and enhances the buffering capacity of the rumen.

Managing mycotoxin risk in forage and feed ingredients

Mycotoxins in forage and feed can seriously reduce performance and profitability long before clinical signs become visible. Insights from the Alltech Harvest Analysis programme, using Alltech 37+® testing and Risk Equivalent Quantity (REQ) assessment, can help producers better understand mycotoxin risk and make informed feed management decisions.

Recent testing through the programme has shown that more than 90% of global feed samples are mycotoxin contaminated, with an average of five to eight mycotoxins per sample. Particularly concerning are deoxynivalenol (DON) and penicillic acid. DON, commonly found in cereals and forages, can reduce feed intake, impair rumen function and lower growth rates. Penicillic acid, which is associated with stored feeds, may negatively affect gut health, immunity and nutrient utilisation. Also, as mycotoxins often occur together, their combined effects can further reduce performance.

As mycotoxin challenges have become increasingly complex, mitigation strategies have evolved too. Building on the proven legacy of Mycosorb A+®, Mycosorb® A+ Evo was developed to provide broader-spectrum protection against the diverse mycotoxin risks found in today's feed and forage, helping to support herd performance and farm profitability.

The Alltech mycotoxin management programme combines testing, risk assessment, technical support and mitigation strategies like Mycosorb A+ Evo to help protect feed quality, animal health and profitability.

Supporting rumen health

Supporting the growth and activity of rumen microflora is key to maximising feed efficiency. The nutrients provided to the rumen microflora must be balanced in terms of fermentable energy and protein supply. Effective rumen microbial activity helps extract dietary nutrients more efficiently.

Live yeast supplements, such as Yea-Sacc®, have been shown to enhance feed efficiency by stabilising the rumen environment and supporting microbial activity. This helps to improve digestion and nutrient utilisation, resulting in better weight gain and overall productivity.

Studies indicate that Yea-Sacc supplementation can lead to an ADG improvement and overall herd productivity.

Conclusion

With the current economic pressures, beef producers must scrutinise their feed management and nutritional strategies to sustain profitability. Improving forage quality, supporting rumen health and implementing effective mycotoxin management can enhance feed efficiency, performance and profitability. Incorporating combined technologies such as Mycosorb A+ Evo and Yea-Sacc® can play a vital role in achieving these goals, supporting productivity, profitability and resilience.

Alltech®

Beef Market 2026 and 2027

By Alastair Brown, Policy and Strategy Officer, Livestock Auctioneers Association Limited

The outlook for the beef sector remains positive as we head into the autumn and winter months. The key factor continuing to drive the trade is the shortage of cattle. Numbers remain tight across the UK, and that is underpinning strong demand for both finished and store cattle. Current forecasts suggest beef production will remain below previous years, reflecting the ongoing reduction in the national herd and the limited number of cattle coming forward for sale.

From what we are seeing in auction markets, tight supplies have been the defining feature of trade throughout 2025 and 2026, and there is little to suggest that this will change significantly before early 2027. Buyers are continuing to compete strongly for available stock, particularly as finishers look to secure cattle for future requirements. Confidence within the trade has also been bolstered by cattle values remaining at historically high levels.

Store cattle are expected to remain a particularly strong trade throughout the autumn selling season. Good-quality yearlings, strong suckled calves and well-grown grazing cattle are all attracting plenty of interest. With fewer cattle available in the pipeline, purchasers are increasingly having to buy stock when it becomes available rather than waiting for larger numbers to come forward. As a result, competition remains strong across most classes of cattle.

Consumer demand remains the main area to watch. Higher beef prices have undoubtedly created challenges at the retail level, but supermarkets and processors have largely responded by offering smaller portions and pack sizes while keeping prices at familiar levels. This strategy has helped maintain consumer confidence and reinforce the perception of value for money, despite the higher cost of beef. At the same time, British beef continues to command strong support thanks to its reputation for quality and traceability. Seasonal demand during the winter period, and especially in the lead-up to Christmas, should provide further encouragement for the trade.

From the Livestock Auctioneers Association's perspective, live auction markets continue to play a vital role in providing transparent price discovery and maintaining confidence throughout the supply chain. With cattle supplies expected to remain tight and demand for quality stock continuing to hold firm, the outlook for autumn and winter 2026, and into the early part of 2027, remains encouraging. While wider economic pressures and consumer spending patterns will inevitably influence the market, the fundamental position of limited supply and steady demand should continue to provide a solid foundation for the beef sector in the months ahead.

www.laa.co.uk

Improving Sustainability in Beef Production with Brayton Gold

by Joel Wade, NWF Straights and Commodities Trader

The dry conditions experienced across many parts of the UK during June and July have left some beef producers reviewing forage stocks earlier than usual. While recent rain has brought welcome relief in some areas, concerns remain over silage yields, grass growth and the ability to build sufficient reserves for the months ahead.

In years like this, sustainability isn't just about reducing carbon footprints or ticking environmental boxes. It's about making the best use of the resources available on farm, reducing waste and maintaining animal performance as efficiently as possible.

One option being utilised on more beef units is Brayton Gold, NWF Agriculture's moist feed designed to complement forage-based diets. Manufactured from carefully selected food industry by-products, Brayton Gold supports a more sustainable feed source by turning valuable by-products into a high-quality livestock feed.

If you are facing tighter forage supplies, Brayton Gold can help stretch home-grown forage stocks without compromising ration quality. By replacing a proportion of forage in the diet, Brayton Gold provides valuable flexibility when forage stocks are under pressure.

Alongside helping to extend forage stocks, Brayton Gold can also improve ration consistency. Its moist, palatable nature helps minimise sorting at the feed barrier, meaning cattle are more likely to consume the diet as formulated. This not only helps reduce feed waste but can support more efficient utilisation of nutrients across the group.

Ultimately, sustainable beef production and profitable beef production often go hand in hand. Improving feed efficiency, making better use of forage resources and reducing waste all contribute towards producing beef more effectively.

As farmers continue to navigate challenging growing conditions and rising production costs, feeds such as Brayton Gold can play an important role in helping businesses remain both resilient and sustainable.

For more information on Brayton Gold and NWF's range of moist feeds, speak to your local NWF Sales Specialist or visit **www.nwfagriculture.co.uk/moist-feeds**

The First Year Matters: Laying the Foundations for Lifetime Performance

by Lucy Richardson, NWF Youngstock Specialist

The first 12 months of a heifer's life is the foundation for her future productivity, fertility and longevity. While genetics determine potential, it is the management during the first year that ultimately influences whether that potential is realised. Every decision, from colostrum management to breeding, plays a role in shaping a productive and profitable cow.

The importance starts at birth, specifically in the first 24 hours, with effective colostrum management playing one of the biggest roles in a calf's future performance. As calves are born without immunity receiving sufficient high-quality colostrum within the first two hours of life is essential to achieve successful passive transfer of antibodies. Aim to feed around 10% of the calf's body weight of a good-quality colostrum within the first four hours, while testing colostrum quality with a Brix refractometer can help ensure calves receive the best possible start. Good colostrum management not only reduces illness and mortality but has also been linked to improved growth, earlier age at first calving and increased milk production later in life.

Building a Healthy Foundation

Alongside colostrum, hygiene is critical. Clean, dry calving pens reduce the risk of disease exposure from the moment calves are born. Prompt navel disinfection, clean disinfected feeding equipment, fresh bedding and well-ventilated housing all help minimise the spread of bacteria and respiratory diseases. Simple routines such as thoroughly cleaning bottles, buckets and teats after every feed can help reduce the risk of scours and other diseases. Healthy calves spend more energy growing rather than fighting disease, allowing them to reach important development milestones.

Growing for Success

Nutrition throughout the first year should support steady, consistent growth rather than rapid weight gain. Providing access to fresh water, high-quality calf starter and forage such as chopped straw encourages rumen development. Monitoring growth rates helps ensure heifers remain on target to achieve breeding weight at the correct age. Depending on breed and production system, replacement heifers should generally achieve average daily liveweight gains that enable them to reach 55-60% of mature body weight by breeding and approximately 85% by first calving. Setting and monitoring these targets helps ensure growth remains on track throughout the rearing period.

Reaching maturity is about more than body size. Replacement heifers require strong skeletal growth, strong feet and legs, and appropriate body condition before joining the breeding program. Animals that grow steadily are more likely to calve at around two years of age with fewer complications, setting them up for a productive first lactation.

Achieving these growth targets is particularly important because physical development during the rearing phase has a direct impact on future fertility.

Why Youngstock Performance Matters Financially

Every setback during the rearing period carries a cost. Poor colostrum management, disease challenges and reduced growth rates can delay age at first calving, increase rearing costs and reduce lifetime productivity.

Well-grown heifers that reach breeding and calving targets on time are more likely to:

- Calve at the desired age
- Enter the milking herd sooner
- Achieve stronger first lactation performance
- Remain productive within the herd for longer

Investing in youngstock performance isn't simply about growing bigger calves. It's about maximising the future return from every replacement animal entering the herd.

Preparing for Breeding

Fertility is built during the rearing period. Disease, poor nutrition or growth delays during the first year can delay age at insemination and reduce conception rates. Breeding heifers when they have reached around 55–60% of their mature body weight, rather than simply targeting a specific age, helps improve reproductive performance and supports long-term productivity.

Performance That Lasts

Longevity is one of the greatest contributors to herd profitability. Well-grown, healthy replacements are more resilient, adapt better to the demands of calving and lactation, and are more likely to remain in the herd for multiple lactations. Every additional lactation spread rearing costs over more milk, improving overall herd efficiency and profitability.

Finally, the first 12 months represent an investment in the future of the herd. By prioritising excellent colostrum management, maintaining high standards of hygiene, supporting consistent growth and focusing on fertility from the very beginning, you can develop replacement heifers that become productive cows with the longevity to deliver lifetime performance.

Youngstock Performance Targets
✓ First colostrum within 2 hours of birth
✓ 10% bodyweight in colostrum within 4 hours
✓ Double birthweight by 8 weeks
✓ Consistent daily liveweight gain throughout rearing
✓ Reach 55-60% mature bodyweight at service
✓ Reach 85% mature bodyweight at first calving

Step Down Weaning

by Louisa Lloyd, NWF Ruminant Nutritionist

Step-down weaning is a gradual method of transitioning a young animal from milk or milk replacer to solid feed without causing excessive stress or a growth check. In calves, the aim is to encourage early concentrate intake so the rumen can develop properly.

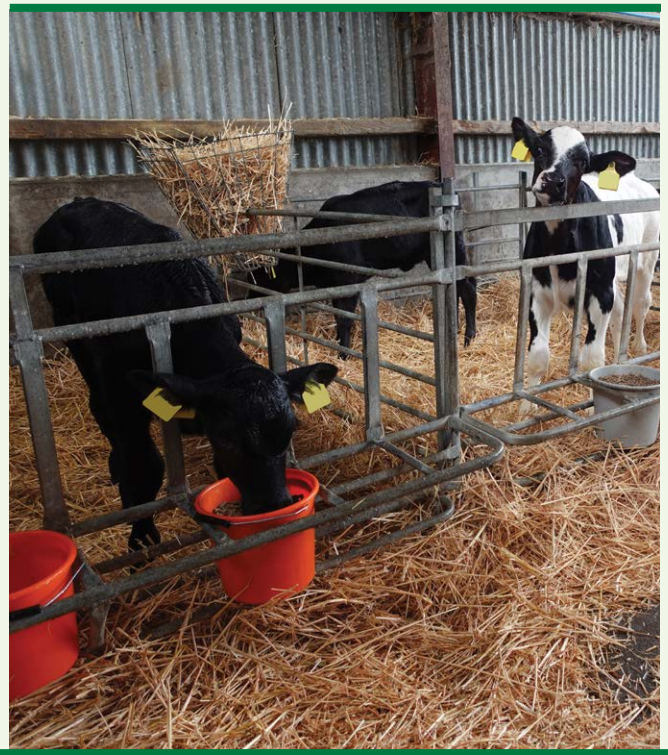
Aims of a successful weaning period:

- To ensure the momentum of growth and development pre-weaning is maintained post-weaning.
- To rear healthy, resilient calves that will perform well as they continue to develop.

How to ensure a successful weaning period:

As calves transition from a fundamentally monogastric animal to a functioning ruminant, their energy source changes from primarily glucose from milk feeding to microbial fermentation of solid feed and the absorption of volatile fatty acids, such as butyrate and propionate. This highlights the importance of rumen development during the preweaning phase; getting this right from the start will put the animal in good standing for the rest of her life. There are four key areas to consider when developing a strategy, which include:

1. Age
2. Length of weaning period
3. The provision of feed and forage
4. The approach taken.



Age

A slight reduction of average daily gain (ADG) may be inevitable during weaning, though delaying weaning until the calf is older (and is at least double their birthweight) lessens the extent of the loss. However, in general, weaning decisions should be based on feed intake, health and growth rather than age.

Length of weaning period

To ensure a successful weaning, a plan and adequate time are key to allow that transition to take place. It is recommended to wean over an extended period of a minimum of 14 days. There are benefits seen when weaning over 21-28 days.

When weaning from a high plane of nutrition, the first step is to reduce total milk intake by 20-25%. The calf will look to increase the sold feed intake to compensate for this reduction. This is to remain static for seven days, to allow for the realisation of solid feed. Over the next 2-3 weeks, the remaining milk volume should gradually be reduced. Consistency is key here; protocols should be influenced by labour availability on the farm!

Provision of feed and forage

When calves are born, their rumen is physically and metabolically undeveloped. The milk feed passes through the rumen through the oesophageal groove and enters the abomasum.

Rumen development involves the establishment of anaerobic microbes in the rumen. As calves gradually begin to ingest solid feed, the rumen microbes responsible for fermentation will increase in number and diversify, producing volatile fatty acids, which are essential for nutrient absorption. It is important to feed a high-quality starter feed which supports this development and increase it gradually.

Research has found that calves prefer a nut or a pellet rather than a coarse mix, this is likely down to the molasses content and they will therefore consume more.

Solid feed alongside forage, ideally straw, chopped to 2-3cm, should be offered from the first week of age to encourage intakes before and after weaning. Fibre is necessary for rumen development, but it should not reduce the overall intake of the more energy-dense starter.

Approach

Abrupt weaning, removing all milk feeding suddenly, stops the smooth development of the rumen and can have detrimental effects on calf health and performance. A step-down program encourages starter intake prior to weaning, enhancing rumen development.

10 Week Weaning 6 Litres

	1 Week	2 Week	3 Week	4 Week	5 Week	6 Week	7 Week	8 Week	9 Week	10 Week
	Colostrum	Weaning Period								
Milk Replacer	4 to 5 Litres	5 to 5.5 Litres	6 Litres	6 Litres	6 Litres	6 Litres	5 Litres	3 Litres	2 Litres	2 Litres
Calf Starter	100g	150g	200g	500g	800g	1.3kg	1.5kg	1.75kg	2.25kg	2.5kg

10 Week Weaning 8 Litres

	1 Week	2 Week	3 Week	4 Week	5 Week	6 Week	7 Week	8 Week	9 Week	10 Week
	Colostrum	Weaning Period								
Milk Replacer	4 to 6 Litres	7 Litres	8 Litres	8 Litres	8 Litres	8 Litres	8 Litres	6 Litres	4 Litres	2 Litres
Calf Starter	100g	150g	200g	400g	700g to 1kg	1.25kg	1.5kg	1.75kg	2.25kg	2.5kg

** Minimum recommendations*

Protecting Young Dairy Calves from Ruminal Acidosis

by Colin Buchan, Clyde Vet Group

Good calf nutrition and management during the first weeks of life lay the foundation for healthy rumen development, strong growth rates, and productive cows in the future. One challenge that can arise during the transition from milk to solid feed is ruminal acidosis.

Ruminal acidosis occurs when rapidly fermentable carbohydrates, such as grains and concentrates, are consumed in quantities that exceed the rumen's ability to maintain a stable pH. Acid-producing bacteria multiply, lactic acid accumulates, and rumen pH falls.

Why Calves Are Vulnerable

At birth, the calf's rumen is undeveloped. During the first weeks of life, milk bypasses the rumen and enters the abomasum. As calves begin consuming starter feeds, the rumen develops through microbial fermentation.

Feeding excessive starch-rich concentrates without adequate fibre can result in:

- Reduced feed intake
- Poor growth performance
- Loose faeces
- Abdominal discomfort
- Irregular rumen development
- Increased susceptibility to disease

Practical Steps to Prevent Acidosis

1. Introduce Calf Starter Gradually

Offer a high-quality calf starter from the first week of life allow intakes to increase naturally. Avoid rapid increases in concentrate intake. Fresh starter should be offered daily, and stale or contaminated feed removed regularly.

2. Provide Constant Access to Clean Water

Calves with unrestricted access to clean drinking water typically consume more starter feed and develop healthier rumens. Remember that milk does not replace the calf's requirement for drinking water.

3. Encourage Fibre Intake

Small amounts of clean, good-quality forage can help stimulate rumination and saliva production. Saliva acts as a natural buffer, helping maintain rumen pH.

4. Maintain Consistent Feeding Practices

Sudden changes in feed type, feeding frequency, or concentrate formulation can disrupt rumen fermentation. **When changing feeds:**

- Introduce new rations gradually.
- Allow a transition period of at least 7–10 days.
- Monitor calves closely for changes in appetite and manure consistency.

5. Avoid Overfeeding Concentrates

While concentrates drive rumen development, excessive intake of highly fermentable feeds can overwhelm the developing rumen. Select calf starters with balanced energy, protein and fibre rather than simply focusing on grain content.

6. Monitor Calves Daily

- Early detection is key. Watch for:
- Reduced starter intake
- Dullness or lethargy
- Loose faeces
- Reduced cud chewing
- Variable growth rate

The Importance of Successful Weaning

Weaning is one of the highest-risk periods for digestive upset. Calves should be consuming adequate quantities of starter feed before milk is withdrawn. A gradual weaning programme encourages continued feed intake and reduces stress on the developing rumen. Abrupt weaning can result in setbacks to growth and digestive health.

Take-Home Message

Preventing ruminal acidosis is largely a matter of careful feeding management. Consistent nutrition, gradual introduction of concentrates, access to clean water, and support for healthy rumen development all contribute to stronger, healthier calves.

NWF Youngstock Feeds

NWF Agriculture manufactures a comprehensive range of high-quality youngstock compounds and blends, specifically formulated to improve calf growth rates and calf health. All NWF feeds are manufactured at UFAS approved production sites located in Cheshire, Cumbria and Devon, delivered direct to farm or available for collection.

NWF Calf Starter Pellets	A high-quality starter pellet that is suitable from birth until weaning. A high energy, palatable feed formulated to promote early intakes and rumen development.
NWF Vital Rearer	A specialist diet to complement a grass silage-based diet. Available in a range of proteins.
NWF Super Rearer	This diet has been formulated to complement a grass silage-based diet. Available in a range of proteins.
NWF Deluxe Rearer	A high quality diet with elevated protein levels to suit straw systems.
NWF Fusion Rearer	A rearer diet to complement grass silage and grass-based diets. As part of NWF's Fusion range, Fusion Rearer is soya and palm kernel free.

Milk Replacer and Mazzoleni Range

The NWF Milk Replacer range provides outstanding nutrition for calves. The range is formulated using quality, traceable ingredients and is suitable for calf rearing programmes on either bucket systems or computed-controlled machines. The extensive range ensures you can find the perfect protein and oil levels to suit your needs.

Milk Replacer	Protein	Oil
SKIMMED		
NWF ULTRA MILK PLATINUM ***Our Best Selling Milk Replacer***	**23%**	**25%**
NWF ULTRA MILK EMERALD	**21.5%**	**18%**
NWF ULTRA MILK GOLD	**22%**	**19%**
NWF ULTRA YELLOW	**22%**	**18%**
NWF ULTRA LIFE - SKIM LIFESTART	**24%**	**20%**
NWF ULTRA MILK DIAMOND	**23%**	**20%**
MILKIVIT ENERGIZER LIFESTART	**22.5%**	**25%**
MILKIVIT ONE	**23%**	**27%**
WHEY		
NWF ULTRA MILK BLUE	**22%**	**19%**
NWF ULTRA MILK SAPPHIRE	**22.5%**	**18%**
NWF ULTRA MILK RUBY	**24%**	**20%**
NWF ULTRA LIFE WHEY LIFESTART	**24%**	**20%**

MAZZOLENI SUPPLEMENTS	
HYDRO-LITE	Hydro-Lite is a highly bioavailable electrolyte and energy supplement designed to restore fluids, sodium, potassium and energy lost during stress, illness, heat, transport or digestive upset.
HYDROFORCE	Hydroforce is a highly soluble effervescent rehydration tablet designed to restore fluids, electrolytes and energy in dehydrated calves and lambs.
PREBIOFORCE	Prebioforce delivers both prebiotics and postbiotics, helping prepare and support the immune system during periods of stress, transition or health challenge.

"We've recently switched to ***NWF's Ultra Milk Platinum Milk Replacer*** *for rearing our bought-in calves, and the difference has been clear from day one. We were looking to improve daily live weight gains, so decided to try a new milk replacer, and so far we're genuinely impressed. The calves have a noticeable shine to them now, something we never saw with our previous milk replacer. We feed at 150g per litre, and when paired with a good calf coarse mix, the growth rates have been excellent. It mixes easily, stays consistent, and doesn't separate which makes feeding that much easier. We wouldn't hesitate to recommend NWF Ultra Milk Platinum to any farm wanting to get the most out of their calves."*

M L & S E Jones, Welshpool, Powys

Flock Nutrition over Autumn and Winter

by Paul Mardell, NWF Technical Development Manager

Know Your Forage, Know Your Feed; Winter Feeding Strategies

Grass growth has reached an all-time low across many parts of the country this summer, forcing sheep farmers to dip into winter forage stocks much earlier than anticipated. While understanding how much forage is available remains important, this year the priority for many flocks will be calculating concentrate requirements and putting a feeding plan in place well ahead of lambing.

With feed representing one of the highest variable costs within sheep enterprises, early planning can make a significant difference to both flock performance and profitability. Knowing what forage you have available, how good it is and how long it is likely to last provides the foundation for accurate concentrate feeding decisions throughout the winter months.

However, before making any feeding decisions, it is worth taking time to measure forage stocks and get a forage analysis completed. The results, combined with scanning data, ewe body condition and flock performance targets, will allow your NWF sales specialist to accurately assess any nutritional shortfall and calculate how much compound feed will be required to bridge the gap.

Forage analysis remains one of the most valuable management tools available. Not only does it provide a clear picture of the nutritional value of the forage being fed, but it also helps avoid costly mistakes. Good quality forage can significantly reduce concentrate requirements, while poorer quality forage may mean ewes need additional supplementation much earlier in the production cycle than expected.

Why Analyse Forage?

Calculate concentrate requirements

- Improve feed budgeting
- Avoid overfeeding and wastage
- Match feed to ewe requirements
- Maximise flock performance

Meeting the Nutritional Challenge

As pregnancy progresses, the nutritional demands of the ewe increase rapidly, particularly in twin and triplet-bearing animals. At the same time, physical rumen capacity becomes restricted as lambs develop, reducing the ewe's ability to consume sufficient forage to meet her nutrient requirements. It is during this period that concentrate feeding becomes increasingly important, providing a consistent and reliable source of energy, protein, minerals and vitamins.

The challenge for many farms is not simply deciding whether to feed concentrates but determining how much to feed and which product is most appropriate for the system. Requirements will vary according to forage quality, ewe condition, breed type, litter size and stage of pregnancy. A one-size-fits-all approach rarely delivers the best results.

Targeting concentrate feeding based on scanning results can improve efficiency considerably. Triplet-bearing ewes generally have the highest nutritional demand and should be prioritised, followed by twin-bearing ewes, thinner animals and younger ewes that are still growing themselves. Matching feed rates to requirements helps ensure nutrients are directed where they will have the biggest impact on performance while avoiding unnecessary feed costs elsewhere in the flock.

Getting concentrate feeding right plays a vital role in supporting lamb birth weights, colostrum production and milk yield, while helping reduce the risk of metabolic disorders commonly associated with late pregnancy. In contrast, underfeeding can result in poor ewe condition, weaker lambs and compromised performance at turnout. Equally, overfeeding concentrates can quickly add unnecessary cost to the system without delivering a meaningful return.

Plan Ahead for Winter

With forage stocks already under pressure on many farms, now is the ideal time to review winter feeding plans. Estimating total concentrate requirements early helps to budget more effectively, spread purchasing costs and avoid the pressure of sourcing additional feed at short notice during the busiest part of the lambing season.

At NWF Agriculture, forage analysis can be used alongside scanning results, ewe weights and flock performance data to build tailored feeding programmes that balance available forage with the correct level of concentrate supplementation. This approach helps ensure ewes receive the nutrition they need throughout pregnancy and lactation while maximising feed efficiency and flock profitability.

For help measuring forage stocks, interpreting forage analysis results or calculating concentrate requirements for your flock, speak to your local NWF Sales Specialist. Your **FREE** forage test and nutritional review could be the first step towards a more efficient and cost-effective winter feeding programme.

The First 40 Days: Why Early Pregnancy Management Matters

by Ed Drake, NWF Sales Support Specialist

Once tupping is complete, attention often turns to other jobs around the farm, but the first few weeks of pregnancy can have a big influence on scanning and lambing performance.

In 2026, most farmers have faced prolonged dry conditions, with grass growth slowing/virtually being non-existent during the summer months. As a result, most flocks are entering autumn with tighter forage supplies than originally planned, making it even more important to get the basics right.

During the first few weeks after tupping, embryos are developing and establishing. Any unnecessary stress or disruption to nutrition can affect survival rates and ultimately impact scanning and lambing KPIs.

Early Pregnancy Priorities

- Maintain consistent nutrition
- Avoid sudden feed changes.
- Minimise handling and stress.
- Monitor ewe body condition.
- Plan winter feed requirements early.

Body Condition Scoring remains one of the most valuable management tools available. Ewes should aim to hold their condition throughout early pregnancy, avoiding significant losses before scanning. Regular assessments can help identify groups that may benefit from different grazing management as autumn progresses.

This is also a good time to review winter forage stocks. Following a challenging growing season, many farms may have less forage than expected. A forage analysis can quickly show whether you've got enough quality feed on farm to carry ewes through the winter. Knowing how much forage you've got, and how good it is, makes winter planning far easier and helps avoid costly surprises later in the season.

As scanning approaches, the information gathered now will help producers make better decisions around grouping and feeding ewes according to litter size.

Small management decisions during the first 40 days after tupping can have a lasting impact on scanning performance, lamb numbers and overall flock profitability. With forage supplies under pressure on many farms this autumn, careful planning now will help ensure ewes are well supported throughout pregnancy and into the winter months.

NWF Sheep Feeds

The NWF range of sheep feeds are formulated to optimise production, milk yield and health. Raw materials are carefully selected to include a range of starch sources to allow a balanced and safe digestion, along with digestible fibre to promote rumen health.

A range of protein sources are used including **Ultra Pro-R** and **Ultra Soy** from the NWF protected feed range. This high-quality by-pass protein ensures optimal MPB levels to promote lamb birth weights, milk production and milk quality, which promotes high DLWG, healthy and fast-growing lambs. Our comprehensive range has been designed to suit all systems and forage types.

NWF Ewe Feeds	• Ewetrition 19 Rolls (WM, WI) • Champion Ewe Nuts (WM, WI) • Classic Ewe Nuts (WM, WI) • Premium Ewe Nuts (WM, WI)	• Prime Ewe Rolls (WM, WI) • 2 Good Nuts (LT) • 2 Good Rolls (LT) • **Bespoke Ewe and Lamb Blends Available**
NWF Lamb Feeds	• Fast Lamb Pellets (WM, WI, LT) • Super Lamb Pellets or Nuts (WM, WI) • Spring Lamb Pellets (WM, WI) • Prime Lamb Nuts (WM)	• Vital Rear All-Rounder Nuts (WM) • Lakeland Lamb Pellets (LT) • Delta Lamb Nuts (LT) • Superstock 16 & 18 Nuts (LT)
Mill Key/ Locations	LT = Longtown WM = Wardle Mill WI = Wixland	

Maximising Lamb Output

by Helen Rogers, Cargill Technical Sales Manager

With average scanning percentages of 170% in UK lowland flocks and 145% in upland flocks, poor early-pregnancy management can result in significant financial losses. Nutrition at tupping and throughout pregnancy is key to conception rates, embryo survival and overall flock productivity. Grazing alone rarely meets micronutrient requirements, and deficiencies can reduce fertility while increasing the risk of barren ewes and early pregnancy loss.

Trace elements such as selenium, iodine, manganese and zinc, together with essential vitamins, support egg and sperm quality, hormone balance, embryo survival and placental development, helping to influence foetal growth and lamb vigour at birth.

NUTRIENT	KEY ROLE IN EARLY PREGNANCY
Selenium & Vitamin E	Fertility hormones, egg and sperm quality, embryo survival
Iodine	Conception, lamb development
Cobalt	Energy metabolism, fertility hormones
Zinc	Sperm and egg quality, conception
Copper*	Fertility hormones, lamb nervous system development (where appropriate and safe for breed)
Vitamin A	Embryo survival and development

Many trace element deficiencies are not obvious and can affect flock performance long before visible clinical signs appear. Soil type, grazing management, forage quality and seasonal conditions can all influence mineral availability, meaning even well-managed flocks may fall short of requirements at key stages of the breeding cycle. Ewes carrying multiple lambs are particularly vulnerable to nutritional challenges, while ram fertility can also be compromised by inadequate mineral and vitamin status. Taking a proactive approach through forage analysis and targeted supplementation allows producers to correct shortfalls before tupping, helping to support reproductive efficiency and maximise the return from every breeding female.

Preparations for tupping should begin 6 to 10 weeks before rams are turned out to identify and address deficiencies. Annual forage testing is an important part of this process, allowing targeted supplementation. Don't overlook the rams; sperm production takes around six weeks.

Although needed only in small amounts, trace elements and vitamins have a major impact on flock performance. Investing in mineral supplementation can maximise fertility, improve scanning results and increase lamb output for a successful 2027 lambing.

Cargill | Animal Nutrition & Health

Autumn Pasture Management

by Matthew Clark, Barenbrug UK Agriculture Account Manager

With pressure on forage production and input costs remaining high, making the most of every hectare of grassland has never been more important. Reseeding with high-performing varieties is one of the most effective ways to improve productivity, forage quality and sward resilience.

NWF's grass seed mixtures, developed in partnership with Barenbrug, combine high-performing perennial ryegrasses and clovers to suit a range of farming systems. Whether you're looking for a short, medium or long-term ley, a grazing or silage mixture, or a blend with or without clover, these mixtures are designed to increase the yield and energy output of the swards they replace.

Reseeding also provides an opportunity to address soil issues that may be limiting grass growth. Soil testing can identify nutrient deficiencies, while assessing soil structure can highlight problems such as compaction that may restrict establishment and root development. Getting establishment right helps new swards develop strong root systems that improve nutrient uptake and moisture access, supporting productivity during periods of weather stress.

With fertiliser costs still a significant consideration, reseeded grassland can be up to 25% more responsive to nitrogen than older permanent pasture. New leys also recover more quickly after cutting, helping maximise forage production throughout the season.

Now is the ideal time to identify underperforming fields and plan an autumn reseeding programme. Investing in quality seed today can deliver higher yields, improved forage quality and better returns from home-grown forage.

For more information on selecting the right mixture for your farm, speak to your local NWF sales specialist, read the NWF Grass Seed & Forage brochure, or visit **www.nwfagriculture.co.uk/grass-seed**

Building yourself a resilient forage system

by Charlotte Clifton, NWF Sales Specialist

Producing enough forage has always been a priority for livestock farmers, but producing it consistently is becoming an even greater challenge. Long periods of dry weather can dramatically reduce grass growth, while extreme rainfall can delay grazing, harvesting and field operations. As a result, farmers are often forced to rely on winter forage stocks earlier than planned or purchase additional feed. Building resilience into the forage system is no longer just about growing more grass; it's about producing a reliable supply of quality nutrition in increasingly unpredictable conditions.

Thinking about reseeding?

Reseeding is a long-term investment, however, before rushing to drill, it's important to understand why the field is underperforming. Poor soil fertility, drainage, compaction, weeds and grazing management can all contribute. Soil testing and assessing the existing sward should be your starting point.

Once you're happy your soil health is in hand, it's time to look at seed mixtures. For dairy farmers, this should be a productive, digestible sward capable of producing quality grazing and silage. For beef and sheep producers, the emphasis may be on producing consistent, economical forage to support growth rates while minimising bought-in concentrates. Modern grass and clover varieties offer differences in yield, quality, persistence and disease resistance, meaning the seed mix should be selected according to the job the forage is intended for. Ultimately, a reseed should be viewed as an investment in the ration rather than the field.

Weather, forage and nutrition

Hot, dry conditions that we have experienced this year cause grass growth to slow drastically, reducing grazing forage availability and silage yields, forcing farmers to use winter silage stocks early and/or add in bought-in feed earlier than planned.

On the other hand, grass that has become old or stemmy will likely have reduced digestibility and available energy. If forage intake and energy supply fall, maintaining the milk yield becomes more reliant on bought-in feed. For beef cattle and growing lambs, the consequences will be seen through reduced growth rates and poorer feed conversion. Forage quantity alone isn't enough, we also need to consider the nutritional value of what's going down the feed trough. Forage analysis gives us key information needed to formulate an effective diet. Dry matter, metabolisable energy, crude protein, fibre and digestibility guide us in determining how much nutritional value the forage can contribute to the ration. We can then balance the diet using blends, compounds, straights and moist feeds.

Are herbal leys part of the solution?

With the availability of SFI options, the use of herbal or multispecies leys has gained popularity in recent years. Rather than relying predominantly on traditional mixes of ryegrass and clover, multispecies swards combine grasses, legumes and herbs such as chicory, plantain, cocksfoot and timothy. Deep-rooting species such as chicory and plantain can access moisture and nutrients deeper in the soil, potentially helping the sward maintain growth during dry periods. Legumes such as clover can contribute nitrogen fixation and provide a decent source of protein in the diet.

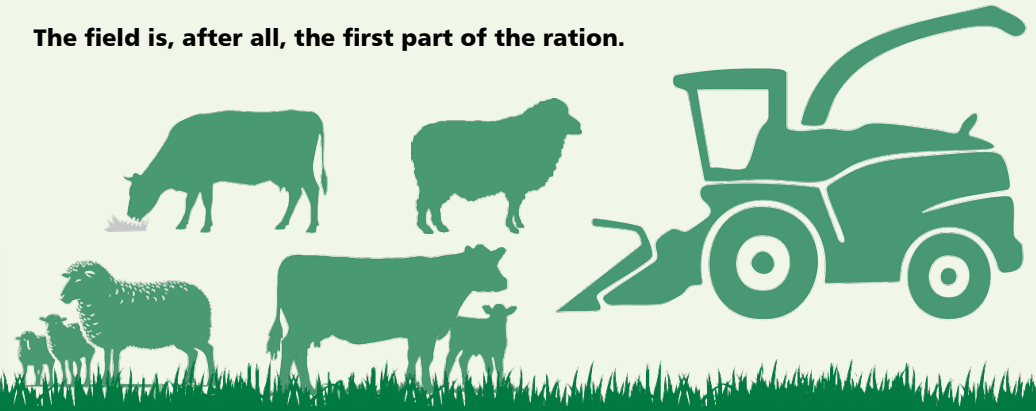
Herbal leys can create a more diverse sward, with different species contributing throughout the season. Herbal leys won't solve every forage challenge on their own, but when managed correctly they can play a valuable role within a resilient forage system. Species selection and soil management remain crucial; however, they could form part of a wider strategy to improve forage quality and resilience. A diverse sward may also provide good-quality, highly digestible forage while potentially extending the grazing season. This could help reduce reliance on stored forage or concentrates when grass availability is limited.

Think beyond the drill - Sow for nutrition

Overseeding can provide an alternative to a complete plough and reseed. Introducing clovers or herbs into an existing productive sward can improve the available diversity without the cost and disruption of replacing the existing ley. The challenge facing livestock farmers isn't simply how to produce more grass, but how to produce consistent, high-quality forage year after year. For dairy farmers, that means producing more milk from forage and reducing the amount of purchased feed required to maintain performance. For beef producers, it means maintaining growth rates and finishing performance while keeping the cost of production under control.

Reseeding, improved varieties, better soil management, rotational grazing and herbal or multispecies leys can all play a part. Start with the animal and work backwards. What level of performance are you trying to achieve? What forage do you need to achieve it? And can your grassland consistently produce that forage when the weather doesn't play ball? A more diverse sward may not be the answer for every farm, but as summers become more variable, building resilience into the forage base will become an increasingly important part of ruminant nutrition and farm profitability.

The field is, after all, the first part of the ration.



Technical services to support your herd and flock

NWF Agriculture offer a comprehensive portfolio of technical services for your farm.

Rationing and Diet Formulation

Through precise rationing using modern formulation models, NWF can fine-tune feeding strategies with greater accuracy whilst keeping cow health and rumen stability in mind. Using NutriOpt, NWF can formulate nutritionally balanced, bespoke blends and utilising a wide range of compounds to complement home grown forages.

Forage and Feed Analysis

The NWF accredited laboratory analyses over 8,000 silage samples each year operating a two day turnaround to help ensure diets are balanced accurately. In addition, raw materials and finished products are regularly analysed to ensure the highest level of quality control is achieved.

Costings and Milk Production Forecasting

Farm costings can play an important role in profitability, enabling attention and actions to be focused on the areas in most need. NWF Agriculture works with Kingshay Dairy Manager to ensure accurate data is collated and reported.

Dung and Diet Sieving

Rumen health is closely linked to fibre and feed utilisation, both of which are key to ensuring optimum milk yield from forage is achieved. The NWF sales team are fully trained in using dung sieves to help determine fibre utilisation and Penn State Separators which can show how physical diet composition can affect rumen dynamics.

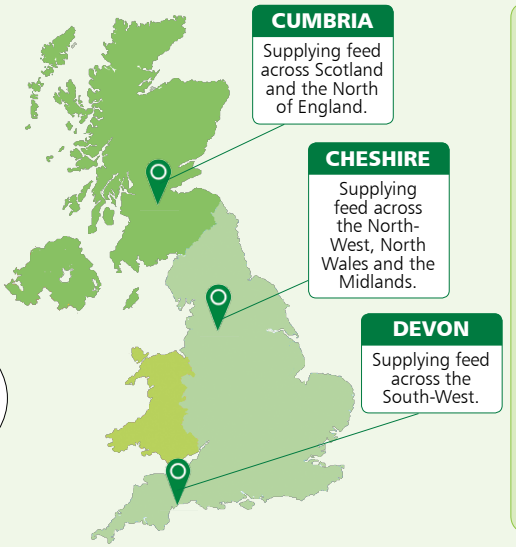
The NWF laboratory processes over 8,000 silage samples a year. Providing accurate analysis of fresh grass, silage and haylage.

Other Services

- Youngstock Tools and Training
- Interherd Plus
- Body Condition Scoring
- Mobility Scoring
- Cow and Calf Signals
- Mineral Analysis
- Soil Testing

OUR FEED MILL NETWORK

NWF Agriculture owns three strategically located feed mills to deliver efficient manufacturing and distribution of livestock feeds throughout the UK.



WHY CHOOSE NWF AGRICULTURE

- National manufacturer of high quality feeds
- Three strategically located UK feed mills
- UFAS Approved Manufacturing Sites
- Expert Ruminant Nutritionists
- Technical Services to Drive Performance

LONGTOWN MILL, CUMBRIA

NWF Agriculture
Sandysike Industrial Estate,
Longtown,
Cumbria CA6 5SS

WARDLE MILL, CHESHIRE

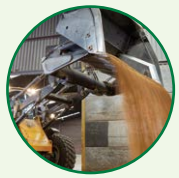
NWF Agriculture
Wardle,
Nantwich,
Cheshire CW5 6AQ

WIXLAND MILL, DEVON

NWF Agriculture
Wixland,
Atherington,
Devon EX37 9HZ

FROM FIELD TO FARM

RAW MATERIALS
Carefully sourced raw materials from trusted suppliers.



QUALITY SOURCING
Raw materials are analysed to ensure quality.

MANUFACTURING
UFAS Approved Manufacturing Sites.

LIVESTOCK PERFORMANCE
Supporting yields, heath, fertility and farm productivity.

NWF Agriculture is a national manufacturer of high quality dairy, beef and sheep feeds to UK farmers. All compound feeds, blends straights and associated products are supported by expert advice and solutions from sales and technical teams.

For further information and prices call your NWF Sales Specialist or call

01829 797100

or email **sales@nwfagriculture.co.uk**

NWF Agriculture Ltd, Wardle, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6AQ

www.nwfagriculture.co.uk