

MAXIMISING LOW QUALITY FEED

Supplementary feeding can seem like a costly exercise, however done correctly and measured thoughtfully, the outcome can pay dividends. Be sure to value your inputs and have the end game in mind.

Three key requirements we look for if we need to supplement feed:

1. Protein – from protein grains or protected sources
2. Energy – from grains high in starch or good fodder for weight gain
3. Dry matter intake – Physically having enough food from either pasture or roughage.

Consistency of feeding out can make or break your weight gains. The rumen takes 3-6 weeks to fully develop to a new feed source, when we feed grain the animal needs to develop a new mixture of microbes to efficiently breakdown and utilise the feed components. If we only feed every few days, or most days and skip the weekends, the pH and populations in the rumen will change and struggle to keep up, often resulting in slower growth rates or weight loss. For this reason, it's also important to be aware of the rates we are feeding to avoid critical issues such as acidosis.

The benefits of feeding a protein source are due to the stimulation of these microbes, that breakdown valuable feed bases such as stubbles to get the full benefits and maintain condition. We have already paid to get the animal to its current weight, so it is more cost efficient to maintain liveweight than it is to put back on later. Keeping an eye on body condition and conducting regular pasture assessments means we can pick the correct date to come in with grains before going backwards.

During autumn, winter and spring the green grass often has enough protein and energy to meet maintenance requirements. Summer pastures and stubbles can be a great source of feed, however with the decreased digestibility (>NDF 60%) the animals are consuming less forage that has a lower energy density. For the rumen to function well and extract energy from feed there must be sufficient protein in the diet - protein grows more rumen bacteria to extract energy from the forage.

Key notes:

- Consistency of feed to maintain the rumen microbes
- More protein = grows more microbes = more available energy
- Target 12% Crude protein (CP) for maintenance and 16% CP for growth

