

Managing pasture through drought

Summary

- Decrease feed demand through destocking.
- Look after good permanent pastures, leave 2-3 cm cover on them.
- Sacrifice poor paddocks, or those due for renovation, and feed out supplements to stock on these.
- After rain, don't restock recovering pastures too early.



Why is management important?

Drought is an on-going threat in many areas. Good management through drought will give farms much faster recovery after drought.

If pastures survive the dry they won't need resowing, which is a major cost saving. Pastures in good condition will also recover much faster, greatly reducing feed-out costs.

Depending on what happens, this may mean systems are back to normal in autumn, rather than spring. Good pasture supply may also create opportunities for buying stock coming out of the dry.

How?

- Decrease feed demand through destocking.
- Look after the good pastures.
- Sacrifice paddocks that are poor producers, or that you plan to renovate, and feed out to stock on these.
- Once the drought breaks, allow pastures to recover & build carbohydrate reserves before restocking. (Ryegrass tillers need 2-3 leaves before grazing - see page 79)

Plant reserves are above ground

The critical point to understand about managing pastures through the dry is that they have their energy reserves above the ground (not in the roots). So look after the best pastures by:

- Leaving some cover on them - this does not mean rank growth, but 2-3 cm length. Don't bare the pastures out.
- Destock them for the duration of the dry.

Pasture species

One reason cocksfoot is so persistent is that it has a tough basal crown, which animals cannot graze out. Because other species do not have this characteristic, you need to avoid over-grazing in drought periods.

Species with improved drought tolerance, such as cocksfoot or pasture brome, should be considered in areas prone to drought.