

Using ryegrass heading dates on farm

Summary

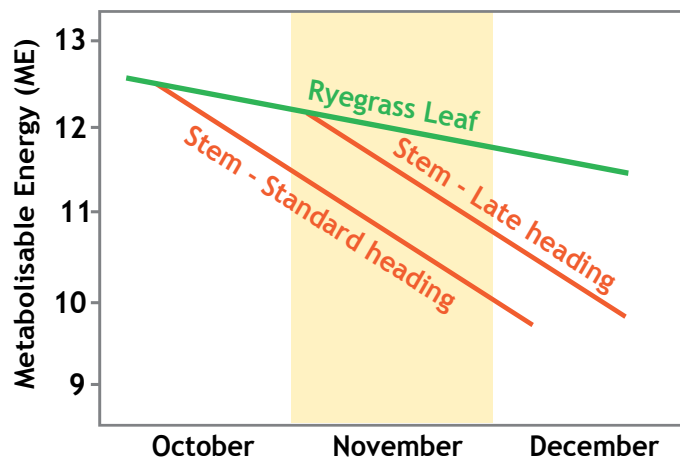
- Having paddocks of different heading dates can improve spring growth and late spring quality, and make management easier.

Advantage of early heading

Early heading ryegrasses (up to about day = +7) will continue to be widely used on NZ farms for their excellent late August and September growth, during what is often a critical feed pinch period.

Advantage of late heading

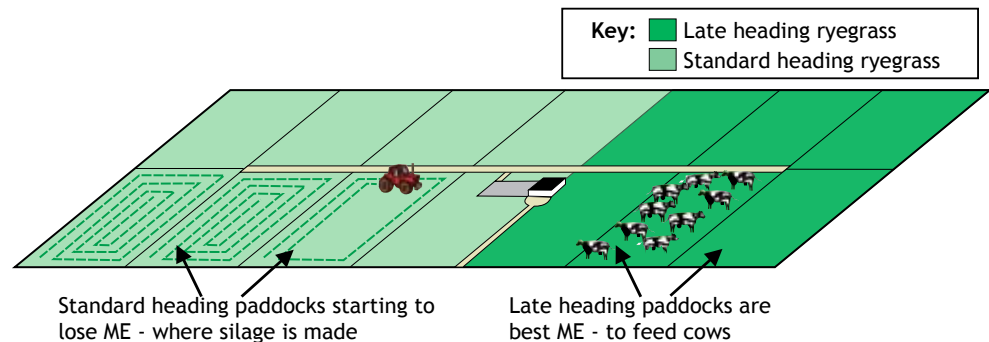
As ryegrass heading starts, stems begin to develop, fibre levels rise and metabolisable energy (ME) drops as illustrated below.



Late heading varieties increase animal intake and performance in November, by delaying the drop off in ME over standard heading varieties.

Using heading dates on farm

For best results, farms need a mixture of heading dates. To help explain this we've drawn a model dairy farm with 14 paddocks below, in November - the most critical month for pasture management as quality falls with heading, coupled with high growth rates. Late heading ryegrasses help feed animals well, as they maintain their feed quality and are preferentially grazed.



With surplus pasture it is also the time for making silage, and this is best done on standard heading paddocks (leaving late heading ryegrass for stock). Standard heading ryegrass can still make excellent silage (ME=11.5+), if it is cut at a herbage mass below 3500 kg DM/ha.