

Fresh grazing brings acidosis risk

Highly digestible grass has high energy and sugar levels and if this is not balanced adequately cows can suffer from SARA (Sub Acute Ruminal Acidosis). Often the first sign of this is depressed butterfat (by up to 0.3%) which has an immediate financial implication.

Other signs include:

- Drop in rumen pH
- Depressed intake
- Laminitis
- Infertility
- Mastitis

The three main causes of acidosis are excessive intake of rapidly fermentable carbohydrates, inadequate ruminal buffering and adaptation to a highly fermentable diet. You may have previously thought that acidosis only occurs when cows are fed winter rations but it can also be a problem on grazed grass. A study carried out by University College Dublin showed 53% of cows had a ruminal pH of <5.8, which is too low for optimal feed digestion and intake, whilst 11% had a rumen pH of 5.5, which meant they had SARA. These were cows 80-150 days in milk being fed grazed grass.

Remember, high D value grass can have sugar in the range of 20-40%, which is similar to feeding a total diet with 63% cereal! Ideally, the rumen needs to be kept in the optimal pH range of 6.5-7%. At this level fibre-degrading micro-organisms thrive, releasing volatile fatty acids, the main energy source for ruminants from forage fibre.

At a pH of 6.4 these organisms digest about 55% of the fibre, while at pH of 5.6 this falls to around 35%, equating to a reduction in milk yield of around 2.5 litres per day. In these acid conditions rumen papilla, the absorption fingers for nutrients, can be damaged.

A further consequence is that the cow can suffer laminitis. This is often followed by hoof overgrowth, sole abscesses and sole ulcers, all of which do not appear until weeks or months after the bout of rumen acidosis.

Biocell is the market leader in protected live yeast, and fed at the recommended rate improves the rumen environment under acidic conditions, buffering the rumen pH and restoring the microbe population. As the rumen is an anaerobic environment, removing oxygen is vital and this is one of the functions of Biocell pure live yeast:

- Increased dry matter intake
- Increased milk yield
- Improvements in fertility
- Good rumen function
- Improved dung consistency

Overall, feeding Biocell reduces the risk of SARA by creating a healthier, more efficient, rumen. This promotes higher intake and better feed utilisation, ultimately leading to more productive, healthy and contented animals and more profit from the dairy herd.

Richard Webster Nutrition Ltd

Tel: 01335 345092 Mobile: 07703 203686

email: richard@rwn.org.uk www.rwn.org.uk