



ANIMAL PRODUCTION SERVICES UPDATE

UTILISING DRY FEED & STUBBLE

Cattle and sheep are exceptional in their ability to utilise dry standing feed or stubble and convert it into a useful energy source. However, to optimise this feed source we need to know how to drive intake to improve animal performance over the dry season.

Causes of reduced performance:

- **Plant maturity**
 - The fibre content increases and the plant becomes bulkier and 'woodier' with age.
 - The digestibility declines substantially and more feed passes through the animal undigested.
 - The crude protein and energy content is low and insufficient to support optimum growth.
- **Low dry matter intake (DMI)**
 - The high fibre content reduces the amount of feed the stock are physically able to eat.
 - Pasture intake may also be limited when the protein falls below 6%.
 - Adequate dry matter intake is critical for optimum growth and production from pasture.

Risky Situations:

- **Dry feed and stubbles are low in protein and minerals - the rumen microbe 'fuel'**
 - The cellulose component of dry feed is digested by rumen microbes to provide energy to the animal.
 - When protein supply from the feed is low, microbes have less fuel. Reduced microbe activity results in reduced digestion and utilisation of dry feed.

Symptoms:

- **Lack of rumen activity**
 - Stock not grazing out paddock (i.e. lingering around water points)
 - Stock seem satisfied on a full belly of water
 - Reduced cud chewing
 - Manure hardens (from slower digestion)
 - Potential for impaction (and death)

Treatment:

- **A healthy population of rumen microbes**
 - Improves digestion of dry feed which allows more to be eaten (i.e. increase DMI).
 - Assists the animal to meet their maintenance (and possibly growth) requirements.
 - Requires degradable protein, non-protein nitrogen and minerals to stimulate their growth.
- **Dry feed block supplements**
 - Promotes rumen activity by providing the limiting nutrients that lacking in dry feed. This will improve digestion and utilisation of the dry feed by stimulating the growth of rumen microbes.

Stubblebuster supplies nitrogen and sulphur for microbe growth. It is designed as a maintenance block.

Protein 50 is a high protein (50%) block. It supplies protein and minerals for optimum microbe growth and is designed to drive production.



Where soil types, plants and water sources may contain high levels of salt, intake of salt based blocks may be limited. In this case, use a molasses based block such as Rumevite Maxi-Graze 30 or the very palatable Rumevite Dry Feed Sheep block.



Management:

- **Put blocks out early in the season**
 - It is far more economical to maintain condition early in the season than to try and regain condition later.
- **Placement of blocks**
 - Initially placed close to watering points (1-2 weeks). Once intake is established, the blocks should be moved further out into the paddock to encourage grazing. The blocks are a useful tool for effective grazing management.
- **Quantity of blocks**
 - Check the block feeding rates to ensure you have supplied enough blocks for the season ahead.

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