

Get the best out of autumn and set up spring, too

Every autumn brings a big decision. Keep milking, or dry off? Which is the best way to reach target cow condition and pasture covers in spring?

With good grazing management, paddock rejuvenation and maybe some nitrogen, it is possible to have your cake, and eat it too – to make the most of the end of this lactation without jeopardising the start of the next.

The key is to grow more pasture in coming months, so you can fuel your milk solids output, build covers and/or feed less supplement.

Grass grows grass

Autumn is the best time increase pasture growth. Grass stays leafy and nutritious much better than in spring, when stems and seedheads reduce quality.

So first, make sure you're grazing at the right stage. It costs you nothing, and can make a big difference. The third leaf stage of your ryegrass produces much more than either the first or second, so aim to graze at 2.5-3 leaves.

Many farmers graze at 2-2.5 leaves instead, and in doing so miss out on as much as 120 kilograms of dry matter per ha each round. Over 100

ha, that adds up a lot of feed!

Upgrade tail-enders

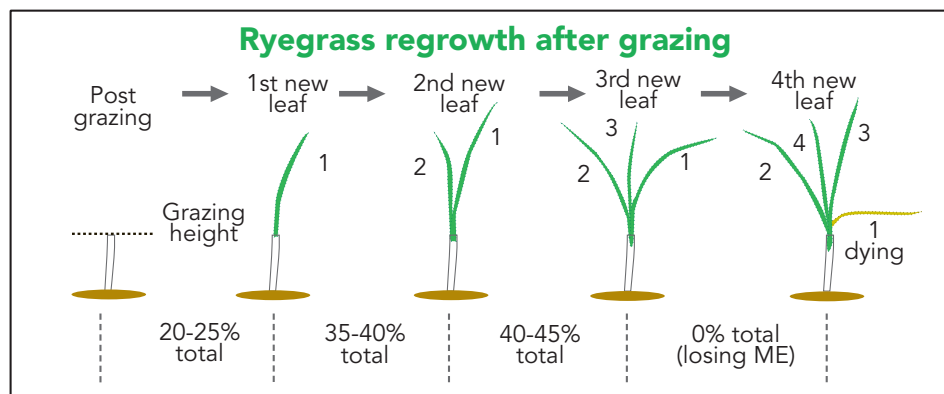
Individual paddock growth rates vary hugely. If your best pastures are ready to eat at 25 days, the worst might take 50 days.

Undersowing or spray-drilling new grass will turn slow paddocks around. Unusual wet weather this season in northern regions means many 'green' pastures are actually full of summer grass and weeds, which will die in winter, so check for those too – they need help getting back on their feet for 2023/24.

Feeding time

Judicious application of nitrogen in autumn – where appropriate – helps pasture grow more. Combine it with grazing at the right time, and benefits compound.

The more time between nitrogen application and grazing, the greater nitrogen's effect on the plant. Moving to an extra half leaf per tiller can increase your nitrogen use efficiency by 30%.



A good pasture has 25 – 30 million ryegrass tillers/ha, all growing at a similar speed. The fastest growth (40-45% of total regrowth) occurs when tillers grow from 2 and 3 leaves.

Hiding in plain sight

Green paddocks are usually a welcome sight in autumn. But this year, we urge you to look closely, and find out what's really growing in those pastures.

Why? Because after last year's drought, a poor spring, and a wet summer in many areas, summer grass and weeds have had a field day.

They're giving a great illusion of growth now, but it's fake news. When you need quality farm grown feed for calving, those paddocks will be too weak and thin to support normal production.

You can nip this looming problem in the bud, by checking all your paddocks and making a plan for those worst affected by summer grass and weeds. Your local seed rep can help with this, and so can we.

Grass to grass renewal is often the best option in these cases, using spray drilling to first kill existing vegetation and make space for new ryegrass seedlings to establish.

For more detail on how to make this work for you – and why it's worth making the effort now – sign up to Insight at www.barenbrug.co.nz.

