

# Technical Update –Managing butterfats in early summer



Information correct as at 12.00pm on 15.05.20

- Seasonal drop in butterfats is a normal phenomenon at this time of year
- Management and dietary actions can be taken to minimise falls
- Reduce risks of heat stress where possible

Many farms experience butterfat drops at this time of year and with cows out on spring grass it can be a tricky phenomenon to correct. Many factors come into play with butterfats such as genetics, breed, stage of lactation etc. There is also a seasonal factor of falling butterfats in the spring and summer in the Northern hemisphere and even cows that are housed tend to see a dip in butterfat. This is not fully understood, but heat stress could be a factor. If you are experiencing difficulties with falling fats have a discussion with your consultant who will help develop the best strategy for your situation but below are some factors that could help.

- Ensure that forage is making up at least 50% of the diet. This can often be difficult to estimate especially with cows grazing. Measuring sward covers will help with this calculation.
- Make sure the ADF level (lignin and cellulose) of the ration is at least 20%. Cows do not eat percentages, so it is important to monitor this in the context of the diet the cows are actually eating.
- The addition of some long fibre can help with the retention time of the ration and thus slow the outflow rate of the ration. 10% of the diet should be above 4cm unless compact feeding.
- High NDF feeds will help to support butterfats so switch to a high NDF cake and consider sugar beet pulp, soya hulls or even NIS.
- Make sure that diets are not being sorted, this is particularly important when small amounts of conserved forage are being fed to supplement the grazed grass along with additional concentrate. Some cows are very good at sorting the concentrates from the forage and thus inducing acidosis which causes butterfat depression.
- The addition of Palm oil (C:16) to a ration can help to boost fats and they are often an efficient way of delivering fat precursors to the udder.
- Monitor cow condition as cows that are either too fit or under condition can have an impact on milk fats.
- Feed adequate protein to ensure the correct energy to protein ratio is being fed to ensure efficient fibre digestion.
- Avoid excess fats and unsaturated oils as these can coat the fibre in the rumen and kill the fibre digesting bacteria. Distillery by-products and some purchased oils can be high in unsaturated fats.
- Feeding buffers such as Actisaf yeast, Acid Buf, salt, bicarb, limestone etc will help to maintain rumen pH and give the best environment for fibre digestion to take place.
- Under certain conditions you can get altered pathways in the rumen which affect biohydrogenation and produce transfats which are devastating to milk fats. To reduce this impact, try to feed lower amounts of feeds that are high in linoleic acid such as wheat and maize distillers, particularly in the hot weather.
- Compact feeding has been shown to be effective in helping with constituents with fully housed herds