

PRESS INFORMATION from *The Dairy Group*

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Don't miss out on butterfat *By David Donaldson, The Dairy Group*

“Average butterfat levels in the UK are well over 4% and with huge increases lately in the demand for butter, it is important to maximise butterfat levels in milk”, says David Donaldson, national nutrition specialist with The Dairy Group. He goes on to say “Some dairy farmers are struggling to maintain levels, which can be a winter problem with high levels of starch and sugar leading to acidosis, but at grass a different issue is involved.

A farmer I met recently was grazing beautiful silage aftermaths, with really leafy, digestible grass and a lot of clover in the mix as well. Butterfats were hovering just above 3.6%. As many contracts pay between 2.5p to 5p per 1% fat, each 0.1% fat is worth 0.25p to 0.5p per litre, so 0.5% fat can be worth 1.25p to 2.5p per litre. Typically we do not see any reduction in milk yield, but the loss of income from butterfat can still amount to over £2,800 per month on a 150 cow herd.

What is going on?

- Very digestible pasture certainly can have an effect on butterfat levels in milk. Very high intakes and therefore passage rates can lead to loose manure and a decrease in fibre digestion in the rumen.
- Most fat in milk is saturated fat, but a lot of the oil in pasture is unsaturated. The rumen is normally pretty efficient at hydrogenating these back to saturated fat. Rumen fermentation can be compromised resulting in more unsaturated fat reaching the udder and reducing total butterfat.
- Oil levels in pasture can be very high. In lush grass you can see levels of almost 5% and a lot of this is Linoleic acid (CLA). These fats can influence the mammary glands normal enzyme systems necessary for milk fat production.

What can you do?

- Make sure dry matter intakes are adequate. Freshly calved cows in particular will get into serious negative energy balance (NEB) and this will not only impact butterfats, but also potentially fertility.
- Check levels of rapidly fermentable carbohydrates in the diet and add a buffer if necessary.
- Check diet oil levels, particularly the polyunsaturated ones (PUFA).
- Avoid selection of any buffer feed, by ensuring all cows have access. At least 24 inches per cow is needed when you are feeding a buffer as cows do not have much time to eat.
- Increase level of long fibre in the diet if necessary and don't over process the diet.
- Additional fat can help, but only true C16 fats. Calcium soaps can depress butterfats and many commercial products contain a range of fatty acid chain lengths and some of the longer chain types can also depress butterfats. Check with your supplier to make sure what type of fat is included. Some aligned contracts prohibit the use of Palm oil products, so again check carefully.

At The Dairy Group we can help assess your diet to minimise any loss of milk income. Please contact us if you would like to get your diet checked.”

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For further information please contact:

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