

# WET WEATHER MANAGEMENT

Hayden Kendrick  
Dobson

## Introduction

Managing your dairy farm in extreme wet weather can be one of the most stressful and challenging times of the year.

I will be discussing different farm management options I have chosen to apply to our farm and reasons why I have made these decisions, during wet periods at different times of the season.

I have 16yrs experience dairy farming on the West Coast and the views I present will be my own, along with other farmers in my region, which may be right or wrong but is how we choose to get through this time in a practical point of view.

## Management options

My experience in these times has taught me to be resilient, and to have a plan in place.

I have also learned this plan needs to be prepared to change day by day if needed to simply get myself, farm and cows through these extremely tough times.

Each farm is different; we all know that so each farm's approach to these times is different.

The approach I take is as follows

We typically get our wet periods in spring and /or late autumn.

### ***Spring***

In the 2010/2011 season we had 28 out of 30 days (500mls) cold wet weather in September.

This hit us coming into our second round. I didn't know how long it was going to rain for, but from the first week our farm began to get very wet. I had decided my main focus was to try feed my cows 16 - 18kg/DM/day and to reduce pugging as much as possible.

This was becoming very difficult as each day came along the farm just got wetter and wetter.

My tips for getting through are as follows

- Be honest for your cow's sake. Score each paddock daily as they go into it, and be realistic with the residual you are using to determine your break size or supplement required.

- Keep a close eye on weather forecasts and plan your paddock allocations to suit with your wetter and more free draining paddocks in mind.
- Communicate regularly with your neighbours. Discuss what works and what you're having trouble with. This act as a comfort to know your not alone in the battle which boosts moral and may give you ideas to take home to try.
- Watch how your cows are behaving, you'll know yourself if there being feed well or not and act on you judgment.
- I found myself using 30-40% wastage when scoring paddocks which made it impossible to hold my round length out because I was simply trashing paddocks to maintain my round length with cows walking in & out making mud.
- In these wet times I, and farmers around me, allow the round length to speed up.
- I let my cows go on to an 18day round length. I chose an 18day round for two simple reasons. Firstly the lay out of our particular farm and secondly my decision that 18days was as fast as I was prepared to go.
- My philosophy is I can farm my way out of a low cover if cows and farm are looked after. If not it is an extremely costly exercise to rectify with regrassing and problems related to cows losing weight impacting on the current season and next.
- We have 42 paddocks on the farm. This meant I was offering cows a full paddock day and night, with the flexibility of using supplements to fill gaps when needed, as paddocks got to a level of not providing enough DM needed during parts of this wet period.
- Each paddock has two gates along the race at the front and back. Cows always enter the paddock through the back gate and out the front gate to walk out to effectively halve the amount of hoofs walking through gateways in an effort to reduce pugging at gateways.
- If I was break feeding paddocks, breaks would be constructed in a pie shape, from the gateway to the opposite end of the paddock in the shape of a wedge to stop cows walking over one days break to get to the next.

I was in a situation that my cows were only offered 3-4kg/DM of pasture per 12hrs, so silage and grain was also being used to top up to 8kg/DM.

---

Notes:

Supplement was brought in and calculations of feed cost revolved around how I could get the most DM into the cows with the least amount of wastage with the farms infrastructure available to me.

If feeding silage in paddock I would decide if the certain paddock cows were about to enter would handle silage being feed out in it. If so silage was feed out as lightly as possible to reduce cows standing in one place to long and reduce pugging where silage was feed.

Other options which get used around the district include:

- Waste-not feed bins placed at the cowshed exit, and keeping them topped up with silage/balage after each milking.
- Grazing paddocks then shifting stock onto a purpose build feed pad.
- If a feed pad is not available consider using a sacrifice paddock, or section of race on the farm which gets little use and feed out under the fence line and use as a stand off.
- Consider culling some cows or send young stock away from the dairy platform.
- Put cows on to 16hr milkings or once a day, if stock are being put under stress.
- \*Grazing paddocks then shifting cows on to cow shed yard at a determined time at night or day.

This last option I used myself for a while as I found cows would move from one end of the paddock to the other depending which way the wind changed, which in turn pugged paddocks, kept cows spread out making body temperature cooler and made udders muddy for the next milking. I couldn't see the point in leaving cows on paddocks any longer than necessary. Once cows had grazed to the level I wanted, they were put onto the yard which reduced mud on udders and bunch cows together to help keep them warm. The yard was hosed each milking in an effort to reduced stone bruising on hoofs.

The cows which were still to calve were on a section on our farm which is very hard and dry; this was used as a sacrifice paddock for calving cows. These cows had been forced to live on silage and grain through the shed for 3-4 weeks with every 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day offering grass. This way the milkers were being offered as much grass as possible in an effort to keep them feed.

## ***Autumn***

Autumn management obviously has much the same principles as above but the main difference would be focusing on staying on a longer round coming into winter.

- Management options for autumn
- Round length to be maintained
- If payout looks good, dry off fat, low producing cows to enable milking cows to be better feed.

- Cull cows get sent away early
- Selected cows get dried off early if pasture cover declining or not at target level
- 16hrs or O.A.D milking
- Dry herd off early if needed, prepare for next season

---

Notes: