



Managing Pastures - Readers' Note

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Budgeting and monitoring pasture

We should aim to budget pasture (and other feeds), just as we budget our cash flow. The success of pasture budgeting depends on obtaining accurate pasture growth rates for your property and having a means of monitoring actual pasture cover relative to previous years, which you can compare with budgeted cover. A fortnightly farm walk, during which you estimate pasture cover, satisfies both these needs.

On your walk, assess feed on offer on each block with the pasture meter. This should not be a chore but an opportunity to assess the health of your farm. The data will give you:

- growth rates for various pasture types at fortnightly intervals throughout the year
- post-grazing residues: Are cows grazing too hard? Hard grazing will reduce regrowth and is an indication that cows are being underfed (approx. 1000kg DM/ha is ideal for ryegrass and 300kg DM/ha is ideal for kikuyu)
- pre-grazing DM on offer: Is it too high? Cows tend to waste pasture above 2400kg DM/ha.

Compare feed on offer on the farm this year with last year and calculate surplus or deficit.

Table 8 shows how the results can be recorded. Figure 24 shows how they can be represented. If you have a computer and a spreadsheet program you can automate calculations (one, called PASTURE ASSESSMENT, is available from NSW Agriculture).

Block 3 has obviously been grazed since the last farm walk and so its results are discarded.

Figure 24 clearly indicates a 60t DM deficit compared with last year. Some ways to remedy this might be:

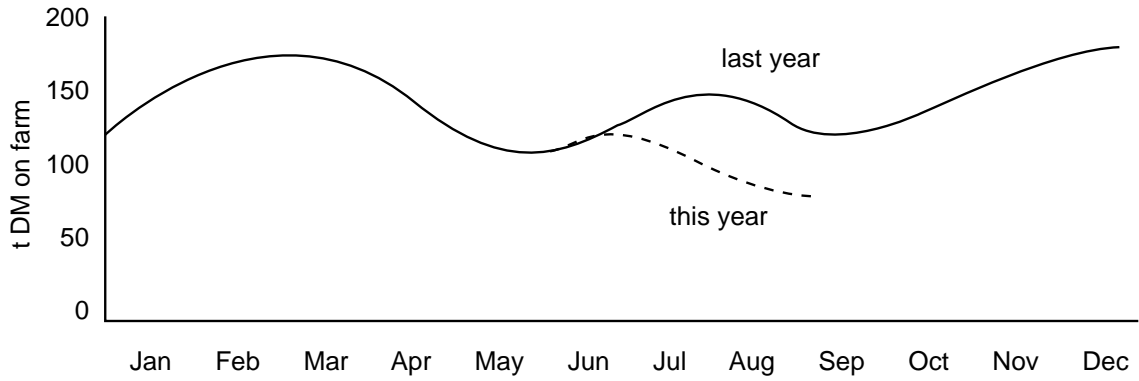
- to remove heifers from the milking area:
agisting 50 heifers (average age 15 months) × 8kg DM per heifer per day × 90 days saves 36t DM
- to buy 60t hay
- to dry off 20 cows @ 15 l of milk per cow per day (1 month early):
feed saved = 20 × 13kg per cow per day × 30 days = 7.8t DM
- to apply 50 kg N to 20 ha at an expected response of 24kg DM/kg N; this should give 24t DM
- to increase concentrate feeding by 4 kg per cow per day for the 180 cow herd:
4kg × 180 cows × 30 days provides 21.6t DM.

Table 8. Sample fortnightly record of pasture growth.

Block	Area (ha)	Pasture type	1 July				15 July				Growth rate kg DM/day
			Meter readings			on offer kg DM/ha	Meter readings			on offer kg DM/ha	
			in	out	no.		in	out	no.		
1	0.6	Ryegrass	15600	15980	50	741	780	1490	50	1385	46
2	1.4	Ryegrass	15980	16940	60	1560	1490	2410	55	1631	5.1
3	0.8	Kikuyu*	16940	18420	70	814	2480	3300	80	-275	-

* When working out average pasture cover for kikuyu, use kg DM/ha = 200 × meter reading (cm) – 1300.

Figure 24. Feed on offer on the farm last year and this year estimated from fortnightly farm walks with the rising plate meter.



Thus, accurate estimates of growth rates can give reliable budgets, and monitoring pasture can flag the need to take action early.