



Managing Nutrition in Changing Weather Patterns

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Part of Scotland's
Rural College (SRUC)

The Last Few Years...

January 2026 – Wettest January on record (NI, SW & S England, E Scotland) – West Scotland below average!

Spring 2025 – UK's Hottest & Driest Spring on Record.

Summer 2025 – Hottest Summer on Record.

Winter 2015/16 – Wettest Winter on Record.

Summer 2012 – Wettest Summer in 100 years.

What is everyone thoughts/ feelings of livestock condition currently as we approach lambing / calving?

Stock – Low BCS

Silage good or bad?

Has it been supplemented appropriately?

Have we enough silage?

Is feed access appropriate?

Have we accounted for additional intakes due to weather – intakes can increase by up to 15%.

Stock – Good BCS

Can we still mobilise condition or are we too close to lambing / calving?

What is forage quality like?

Are we over supplementing / feeding?

Aim to maintain close to lambing/ calving. (Safe Zone 2.5-3.5).



Managing Spring
In peak demand!

Grazing in a dry spring – Set Stocked

Supply

Optimum Grazing Height (maintain!)

- Sheep – 4 – 6cm
- Cattle – 6 – 8cm

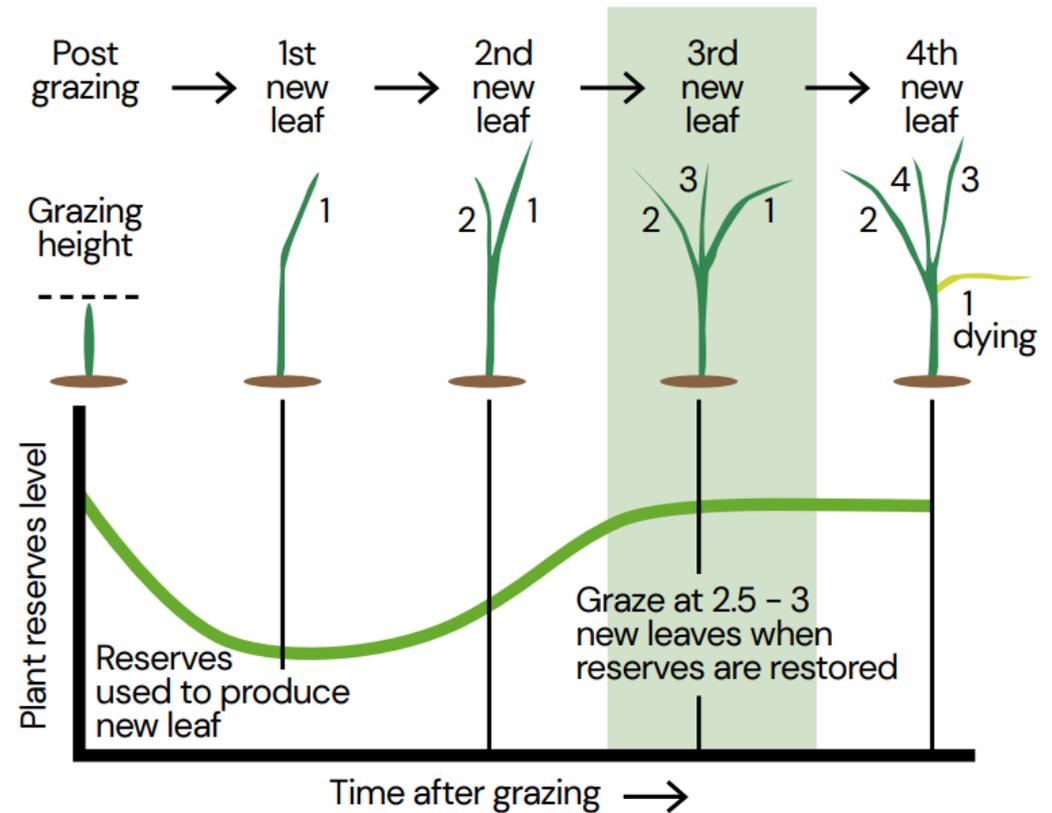
Below this action required....

- Additional forage
- Creep feed
- Reduce stocking density
- Introduce more frequent moves

Demand

Sheep – Lactation = **3-4% Bodyweight**
(70kg ewe (2.1kg DM/day))

Cattle – Lactation = **2% Bodyweight**
(650kg Cow (13kg DM/day))



Reproduced with thanks to AHDB

Source: SRUC Forage First Sheep/Cattle Systems

Grazing in dry spring – Rotational

Spring/ Summer – Ideally target a 21 rest day period, increasing as grass growth and quality decreased.

Keep a close eye on residuals and utilisation and be flexible with moves if necessary – Sward Stick!!

Feeding to requirement (pasture cover 8–10cm at entry):

- Sheep – allow 2% of bodyweight
- Cattle – 1.75– 2% of bodyweight

Grass Height (cm)	Kg DM/ha (summer)	
15	3930	Excessively High Covers
14	3740	
13	3550	
12	3350	
11	3150	
10	2960	Graze
9	2750	
8	2540	Let it Grow
7	2330	
6	2110	
5	1880	
4	1650	Stock Out
3	1400	
2	1120	
1	800	

Source: SRUC Forage First Sheep/Cattle Systems

A Calibrated Sward Stick; Convert grass height to kilograms of dry matter per hectare (kg DM/ha).

Too much or too little?

Excess grass in the rotation :



- Take paddocks out for silage. This high-quality leafy silage is perfect for ewes in late pregnancy.
- Bring more stock on rotation. Ideally with lower feed demand to follow main group e.g. cows or ewes with singles.
- Mowing or topping.
- Deferred grazing – shut up paddocks until late summer/autumn and graze with dry ewes or cows.

Too little grass in the rotation:



- Bring additional paddocks into the rotation to extend rest period.
- Apply fertiliser if conditions are suitable and other aspects are not limiting growth, e.g. low rainfall.
- Feed concentrates or silage.
- Wean lambs from 10 weeks of age or calves from 5 months (155 days) to reduce feed requirements to mature stock.
- Reduce demand by selling cull ewe's, cows or lambs / calves as store.



Summer = Winter
Preparations

Silage – The ideal situation



Stage of maturity: 3rd Leaf Stage

Allow sufficient time post N application (2.5 kgN/ha = 2 unit/acre/day) aim for nitrite >0.1% pre cutting.

Cut on a dry day – aiming for 30% DM.

Cutting in afternoon = highest sugar levels

Wilting <24hrs, High clover 48hrs

Wrap/sheet: in less than 24hrs

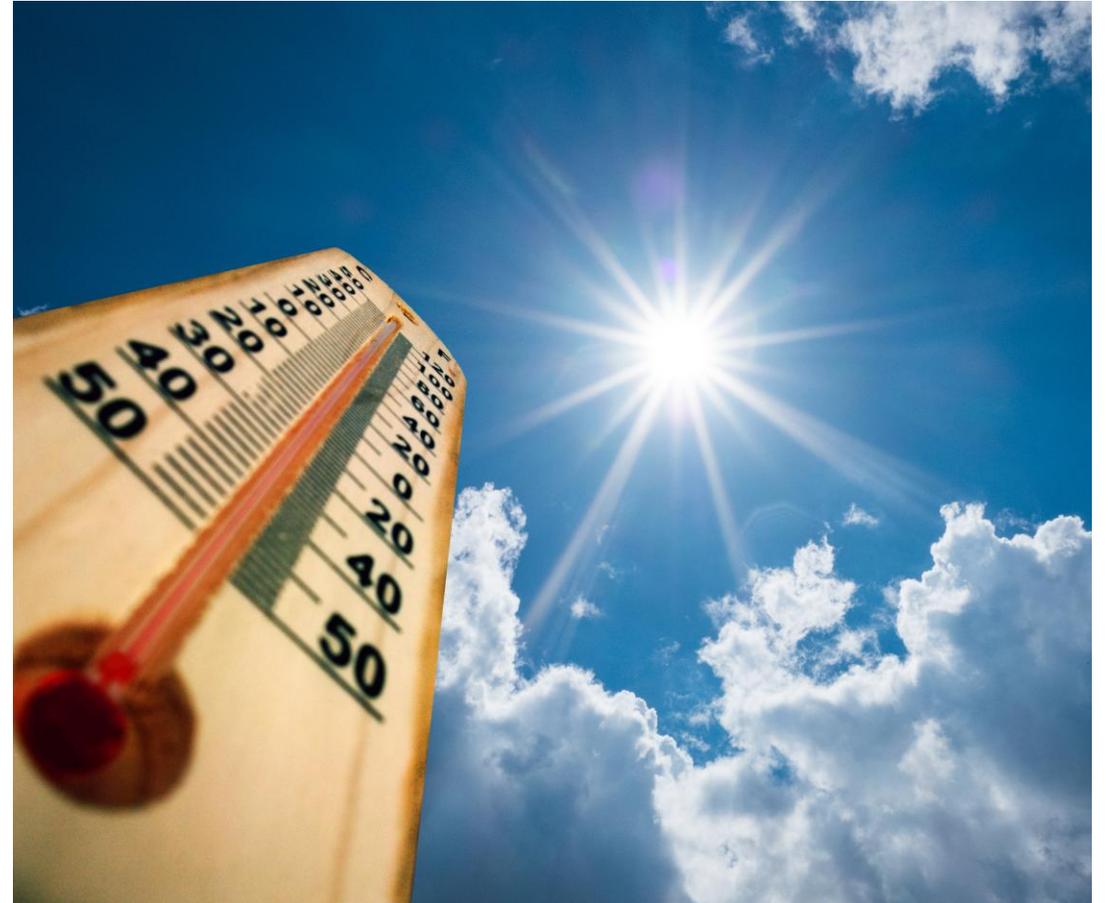
Making the most of silage in a wet summer

- Cut in afternoon when there is a decent weather window planned aim to bale/collect 24hrs later.
- Ted the crop immediately post cutting to aid moisture loss. Conditioner may also increase wilting +20%.
- If using an additive aim for one more suited to wet crops



Making the most of silage in a dry summer

- Cut in morning (after dew has lifted)
- Ensure nitrogen has been properly used.
- If extremely dry avoid tedding/ conditioning to limit nutritional losses and leaf shatter.
- If using an additive aim for one more suited to a dry crop to aid fermentation and limit heating / moulds.
- Compaction can be a challenge in a dry crop – aim for 6 wraps on bales, well rolled pit.



2025 – what did it mean for silage quality?

		Dry Matter (%)	Protein (% DM)	D Value (% DM)	ME (MJ/kg DM)	NDF (% DM)
All Silages (1022)	Min	16.9	5.2	56.2	9.0	38.9
	Average	39.1	12.2	63.4	10.1	51.1
	Max	79.9	20.3	76.1	12.2	73.6

The importance of silage analysis

- Essential for accurate rationing – Dry Matter, Energy (D Value), Protein.
- Allows us to budget for the winter ahead.
- Gives us an indication of how successful fermentation has been.



When & how to sample for accuracy

When: Anytime 6 weeks post cutting

How:

- The sample should be representative of what livestock are to be fed.
- Bales core 2-3 bales into a bucket and mix the cores
- Pit – core front, middle and back or in sample a “W” across pit face – aim for just after feedout.
- 500g to be sent to lab in a well sealed airtight bag, clearly labelled – Name, Farm, Date Sampled, Sample Ref, Cut No
- Send to lab immediately post sampling.
- Avoid sampling on a Friday.





Thank you!

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