



The Farm Consultancy Group

Issue 92 -
June 2018



Welcome to our 92nd edition of the newsletter. Included in this months newsletter are articles on commodities and fertiliser updates, countryside stewardship applications, alternative straw feeding, discussion groups, field drainage and salvaging a difficult spring.

Your feedback and comments are most welcome. If clarification is required, please contact the article contributor or for more articles and news visit www.fcgagric.com.

Edited by Gerard Finnan of David Bardgett Ltd and The Farm Consultancy Group Tel: 07976 426420.

Commodities Update - Andrew Jones

In the last month, the pound has strengthened about a cent against the euro while weakening, for the second month, nearly two cents against the dollar. The GDT price index overall has maintained a stable price with it down 1.1% and then up 1.9% over the month of May, and this recent stability has seen some milk producers increase farmgate price for June.



Milk Powder - This has again remained static in price.

Feed - Soya prices have again fallen over the last month, by approximately £30/t. A spot load on farm expect to pay £370/t, with it currently about £10/t higher for the winter. Rape has decreased by approximately £10/t for the summer and maintained prices for the new season. Wheat has continued to increase in price over the month, while barley has decreased ever so slightly, so they are no longer on parity.

Fertiliser- Currently waiting for new season fertiliser prices, so in the meantime prices have remained stable. The new season Urea prices I was offered earlier in May have now been withdrawn, due to worldwide pressure. The assumption is the price will come down again, however countering this is the continuing increase in oil prices.

Contact Andrew on 07717 442889 or e-mail andrewjones@davidbardgett.co.uk for up to date quotes.

New Season Fertiliser Prices- Andrew Jones

Inside this issue:

Countryside Stewardship	2
Rumplus	2
Discussion Groups	3
Drainage	3
Salvaging a Difficult Spring	4
Interested In a Career with FCG?	4

New season fertiliser prices for AN have yet to be released. Ensure that you don't miss out on the best price, which last year only lasted for 36 hours, please let me know ASAP that you want to be kept abreast of developments to ensure you can achieve the best price possible. I can add you to either an email update until the prices are announced, or I can add you to the list I have of people to ring on the day of release.

Due to the orders I already have on the books, from our buying group, I have been able to do a deal for all orders to have three equal split payments, starting the month after delivery, at no extra cost!

Therefore, if you are not already on my email list or would like a call once prices are announced, please contact Andrew Jones ASAP on 07717 442889 or e-mail andrewjones@davidbardgett.co.uk to take advantage of the new season prices.



Countryside Stewardship: 2018 Applications - Sophie Cahill

For those of you who have requested a Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier or Capital Water Grant application pack from Natural England, before the deadline of May 31st, you now have two months to put your full application together. This should be plenty of time IF you start planning your application now. Remember that the Capital Water Grant is only available up to a maximum of £10,000. The first step will be to contact your Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer (CSFO) if you are hoping to include any of the capital options (e.g. RP4 Tracks, RP15 Concrete yard renewal) that require their endorsement (you must be in a medium or high priority water quality area for this). They will start to get particularly busy with farm visits, so the sooner you contact them, the better. They will just need to see the proposed site of any capital work and to discuss this with you. Once you have had this meeting, your CSFO will then be able to write a letter of endorsement that will be sent to Natural England with your application.

Any capital options that may require planning permission (eg. RP28 Roofing) will also need to be considered as soon as possible, so that you can obtain the necessary paperwork from your local council to go in with your full application.



Consider which fields or parts of fields may be suitable for entry into the Mid Tier scheme, and what work you are willing to put in. Think about the capital work that your farm required to help increase efficiencies. A full list of all the options available can be seen at <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants> and it is worth having a look through these when thinking about your application. Be aware that each option will have its own requirements and may only be applicable on either Permanent Grassland or Arable fields.

The deadline for full applications for Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier and Capital Water Grants is 31st July 2018, so please do contact Sophie Cahill at sophiecahill@fcagric.com or ring 01935 850093 as soon as possible if you require any help with your application.

Rumiplus - Andrew Jones

Now that good feeding straw is in the region of £200/t and in short supply, is it time to think about an alternative source to include in your diets? Especially when I think straw will maintain the current high prices into the new season.

Rumiplus is the new name for a product previously known as Rumiluz. It is high temperature dried lucerne that is chopped to provide scratch factor and structure to a diet without reducing the nutrient density (in fact increasing the diet's M/D) and has a natural buffering effect on the cow's rumen. It has also been shown to increase dry matter intake and lifetime milk yields.



Being Lucerne, the product naturally has a higher protein content than straw (18% compared with 4% of wheat straw) and so can reduce your concentrate cost, and it is a good mix of both RDP & DUP.

It also has other indirect benefits by being naturally high in Biotin, which can improve hoof quality and SCC, and increased levels of Beta-carotene which have been shown to improve conception rates.

Rumiplus is delivered in either full or half artic loads, with a full load averaging 24t. At a price of £220/t surely there is no choice to make vs straw for feeding? Contact Andrew Jones on 07717 442889 or e-mail andrewjones@davidbardgett.co.uk for more details.

Discussion Groups - Phil Cooper

As some of you will be aware we operate several discussion groups that meet on a regular basis, including a spring calving group autumn block calving group and a beef group. These meetings give opportunities for members to visit other members' farms as well as new farms to learn new ideas and understand the pitfalls associated with implementation. Members also gain confidence to take on new ideas after seeing them in action on a farm first hand.

Our autumn block calving group recently met for the annual benchmarking meeting. This is an excellent opportunity to look in detail at business costs and compare them with other group members. Below are some of the comments that came out of the meeting, which you may find useful:

- Group aim is to reduce total costs of production to below 27 ppl target 25 ppl.
- Start calving later in the year, end of August, to lengthen period of grazing before drying off and calving back on to winter diet.
- Tighten up calving block to make management of cows as one group easier, 12 weeks maximum.
- Everyone should be measuring and recording grass to improve grazing management. Knowing your grass wedge should give you confidence to feed less cake and take more from grazed grass. M+20 at the moment should be the target from grass.
- Start paddock grazing youngstock to improve growth rates and reduce need for summer feeding of cake.
- Vet costs: reduce number of visits on routine as this can lead to finding jobs for the vet as he/she is on farm.
- Look at type of drugs being used, are there cheaper alternatives available, e.g. Bovaclox dry cow treatment (but watch the withdrawal period)?
- Use milk recording to start selecting which breed of cow is performing the best on your system.
- Soil test regularly and use results to improve soil and crop quality.
- Insurance: Shop around for like for like quotations.

The keep message is to remember there are two elements to cost, how much you pay and how much you use. You might not be able to control the price you pay, but you can control how much you use.

If you would like to join a discussion group or are interested in benchmarking please contact Phil Cooper on 07798 673665 or email pcooper@fcgagric.com.

Drainage - Phil Cooper

The wet weather and snow we had earlier this year is a reminder that field drainage is still very relevant. The extra water has highlighted areas that may require attention either to drain for the first time or to make repairs. Well drained fields warm up quicker, can carry stock and machinery quicker and release nutrients better. Well drained fields are essential for turning cows out to graze early to gain the benefits of an extended grazing season. Remember it is roughly £3 per day cheaper to graze a dairy cow than to house it. Investing in drainage can be an expensive business ranging for £2,000 to £5,000 per hectare depending on soil type and drainage system required. It is important to carry out research locally before deciding on the type of drainage system to use and having a local, experienced drainage contractor is essential to ensure you get the best job for your money.



There are two main types of drainage; deep and shallow. Deep drainage tends to be used in more permeable soil types as the water easily flows to the pipes through the soil. Shallow drainage with closer spacing of pipes is more suitable for heavy, less permeable soils, which have restricted soil water movement. Before considering the expense of fully draining a field, take a walk around the field edge and check for existing drain outlets. Are these blocked, is the ditch full or would simple mole ploughing work?

Whatever the answer to your situation, it is worth spending some time and money to improve drainage so that you can benefit from fields warming up earlier, carrying stock and machinery quicker and aiding the release nutrients to the crop.

To discuss drainage further contact Phil Cooper on 07798 673665 or email pcooper@fcgagric.com

Salvaging a Difficult Spring - Gerard Finnan

When this 8,000 litre split block calved herd, turned out to grass on the 16th April 2018, three weeks later than normal. Any cover over 3,200kgs was very difficult to get grazed down to 1,700kgs.

By measuring grass weekly, using and interpreting the data this spring, has ensured the ideal grazing wedge at the end of May. This has been achieved from a disastrous spring. Out of adversity comes opportunity. It is never too late in the season to start measuring grass and taking control of your most valuable and cheapest resource.

Extra MOPFF generated from 200 cows is £6800 at same milk price for May 18 vs 17, plus a 25% improvement in the 21 day submission rate for the spring calved block.

In May alone, this farmer's milk from forage has increased by 13% over a whole year, this would equate to 450L extra from forage per cow.

How was this achieved?

- Herd split spring/autumn only while at grass. Auto-shedding gate segregated after milking.
- 3 Kg/DM silage/Hd fed to Spring calvers (averaging 35L/day) and given access to first feed in each paddock.
- Autumn group cleared up grass behind Springs.
- Silage also fed as stocking rate is 6 cows/Ha which grass growth rates couldn't support a grass only diet.
- Post grazing covers of 1,700kg/ha, ensuring excellent quality re-growths.
- A light cut of silage bales taken off 30% of grazing area in mid April.

The bigger benefit now is that this grazing area is now set up to produce quality grazing with no silage required in diet in June. The autumn calvers drying off will reduce the stocking rate. Total milk production is the same milk at end of May 2018 as 2017 with 20 less cows in milk and butterfats are 0.21% higher and protein similar to 2017.

Don't blame the adverse spring conditions for procrastinating and not making this happen. Do you have a plan and are you on target to achieve it? Contact Gerard Finnan today, on 07976 426420 or e-mail gerardfinnan@fcgagric.com to put an increase in milk from forage per cow plan in place and make it happen!

Interested in a Career with the Farm Consultancy Group?

Our Sherborne office is currently recruiting a **Farm Consultant** and a **Farm Secretary** to service our expanding rural customer base.

Though experience in these specific roles is not essential, a background and knowledge of agriculture is crucial. These skills, knowledge and common sense cannot be taught.

We are looking for people with the motivation and willingness to learn new skills, be good communicators, numerate and like problem solving. We will invest in training both within our office and through a structured FCG training programme for the right people.

If you know a family member, neighbour or friend who may be looking to develop a career in agriculture, get them to give Gerard Finnan a call in confidence, on 07976 426420 or email your cv to gerardfinnan@fcgagric.com

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