

Tactics for Tight Times

Tips to manage dairy cows through the summer

- ✓ Feed cows a nutritionally balanced diet.
- ✓ Provide cows with unrestricted access to cool, fresh drinking water.
- ✓ Maintain grazing residuals at 4–6cm to optimise pasture persistence and autumn re-growth.
- ✓ To reduce heat load of cows, consider changing milking times.
- ✓ Provide shade and use sprinklers to help keep cows cool.

Nutritionally balanced diets

- › Seasonal conditions have impacted forage quality, reducing cow dry matter and nutrient intakes.
- › Understand the quantity and quality of forages you have on hand by doing a thorough stocktake of your feed inventory and feed testing all your main feeds.
- › Consider energy supplements and protein sources that may help make up for lower energy and/or protein levels in your forages.
- › Use the new Dairy Australia/DEDJTR [Feed Planner](#) tool to balance the diet and develop a month-to-month feed plan for your herd. See the Dairy Australia fact sheet *Dealing with low quality forages* for further information.

Grazing residuals

- › To optimise pasture persistence and autumn re-growth, don't over-graze pastures over summer. Maintain residuals at 4–6 cm to help retain soil moisture close to the surface and provide protection for extreme soil surface temperatures. Grazing may need to be restricted, as cows tend to graze lower than this.
- › Where possible, aim to maintain some green material over summer (e.g. green stem, pseudostems). For further information on managing summer grazing see the video [Summer–Ryegrass Grazing Management](#).

Milking and feeding times

- › As temperatures rise think about changing milking times.
- › Get the cows onto available pasture before the temperature rises and starts to affect their desire to graze. This may mean milking earlier in the morning. Offer the cows a larger part of their daily pasture allocation at night as they are more likely to graze harder at night when it is cooler.
- › Walking cows to the dairy during the hottest part of the day (about 3pm) adds to their heat loads. Delaying afternoon milking until 5pm may increase milk yield by up to 1.5 litres per day, regardless of whether the cows are sprinkled with water while in the dairy.
- › If you have limited pasture available, feed a mixed ration, hay or silage on a feedpad or in a sacrifice paddock close to the dairy with good shade and water access. This will help achieve higher feed intakes on hot days and take the edge off cows' hunger before letting them into a new strip of grass, making it easier to control the grazing intensity and leaving a residual close to target.

Drinking water access and quality

- › Unrestricted access to cool, fresh drinking water is essential as cows' water intake and turnover rate are closely associated with their feed intake and milk production. (Given that milk contains 87% water, this is not surprising).
- › In hot weather, allow for 200–250 litres per cow per day of drinking water—double what cows usually need each day.
- › Ensure that cows don't have to walk far for a drink at any time of day and that water flow rates to troughs are sufficient to meet peak cow demand. Having a large water trough on the exit side of the dairy is a must, as cows may consume 30–50% of their daily water intake within one hour of milking.
- › Cows are more sensitive to water quality problems than other animals, so if you have any doubts, arrange with a specialist laboratory to have a farm water sample analysed for its physical, chemical and microbiological composition.

Shade and sprinklers

- › Providing shade is critical as it reduces the amount of heat that cows absorb during the day. Aim for 4m² per cow at midday.
- › Sprinkling cows in the dairy holding yard before milking on warm-hot days is a must whenever the air temperature is above 25°C and / or cows' resting breathing rate is more than 60 per minute (indicating that their heat load has increased and core body temp. is above normal).
- › For more information on keeping cows cool, go to coolcows.com.au.

Flies

- › Excessive flies can severely irritate cows, disrupting feeding and contributing to heat stress.
- › Control fly breeding areas. If necessary, treat cows with an approved pour-on preparation and re-apply at regular intervals.

Dry cows and heifers

- › Autumn and year-round calving farms with a high heat stress risk level should ensure that their dry cows have access to adequate shade and cool, fresh drinking water at all times. This avoids the long term adverse productivity and health impacts of heat stress during late pregnancy on cows and their unborn calves.
- › Heifers will eat more feed and grow at a faster rate if access to shade and cool, good quality feed and cool, fresh drinking water are provided.

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Dairy Australia Limited ABN 60 105 227 987
Level 5, IBM Centre
60 City Road, Southbank VIC 3006 Australia
T + 61 3 9694 3777 F + 61 3 9694 3701
E enquiries@dairyaustralia.com.au
dairyaustralia.com.au

