

## **Minimising the impacts of flooding – maximising next season**

### Assess your farms position

As farmers assess the damage from recent heavy rains and flooding they need to concentrate on minimising the carryover effects to next season. Farmers need to start with the things they can control and are encouraged to assess their farms' position, protect their stock and stick as close as possible to their autumn and winter feed budgets.

Take the time to weigh up the situation on your farm and don't make rash decisions especially if they involve capital stock.

Devise a plan and don't be afraid to ask for help. Involve your consultant, banker and other rural professionals in your decisions.

In the next few days and as the flood waters recede farmers need to assess damage to water supply and reticulation systems. Identify which troughs are contaminated with silt and clean them to ensure stock have access to clean water. Check for damage to access lanes, tracks, culverts and fences and identify what clearing of flood debris is needed.

Damaged, wet tracks can create issues with lameness therefore pay attention to stock movement over these areas and if necessary consider OAD milking to reduce walking distances. If numbers of lame cows are increasing contact your local Healthy Hoof provider, they are trained to help with this problem.

### Get control with a feed plan

It is essential to get control with a feed plan. Assess the current situation, and the current feed resources you have available now, expect in a weeks time and for a month out.

Soil temperatures are still 11 to 12 °C therefore conditions are still good for growth if it remains mild.

A plan on the back of an envelope is better than no plan at all.

Once you have a plan you can work out the best strategy for the cows. Most farms will be in their final 4 weeks of lactation therefore consider OAD milking, culling or drying all/a proportion of the herd off to make the feed budget work.

Be realistic about how many stock you can feed and at what cost. It may be better to run less stock and do them better and allow pastures to recover faster.

Assess what pasture you have that is unaffected by flooding and what supplements you have on hand.

Don't put cows onto silted pastures until you absolutely have to as silt can stop rumen function. Minimise the proportion of their diet that comprises silted pasture. In cooler temperatures grass can survive 10-12 days in clean water and 4-10 days in silted water.

If silting is less than 50 mm deep grass will grow through it. From 50 to 130 mm survival is varied and under more than 130 mm of silt grass survival will be poor. Grass that has been flattened by silt is best left to rot.

Have a plan for managing wet soil conditions. Consider on-off grazing, using stand-off areas/feed pads and reducing stocking rate to minimise the risk of soil and pasture damage. Miss management of pasture and soils now will impact on spring pasture growth.

#### Check winter feed supplies and protect cow condition

Revisit your winter feed budget in light of new information on crop yields, supplements available and autumn feed on the milking platform.

Check winter crops for flood damage and be realistic with yields. Do you still have enough silage on hand to balance the forage crop diet? This is especially important with fodder beet due to the higher sugar content and low crude protein concentration.

Be proactive in closing the gap between supply and demand in your winter feed budget. Take advantage of the \$0.40 increase in forecast payout and buy in feed if required. Find out what feeds are available and at what price. If it is available and you need it buy it now as poor autumn growth in the North Island is putting a lot of pressure on supplementary feed supplies.

Protect cow condition as this is next season's production. Dry off light conditioned cows to ensure they achieve pre-calving condition score targets of 5.0 for mature cows and 5.5 for heifers and 3 year olds.

Finally, don't forget your family, staff, partners in your business and neighbours. Good communication will minimise stress.

#### Summary

- Assess your farms position
- Get control with a feed plan
- Monitor daily
- Buy in feed if required
- Prioritise stock
- Keep communicating

The following documents are available from [www.dairynz.co.nz/flood](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/flood)

[Key points for dealing with floods](#)

[Managing stressed animals in a disaster situation](#)

[Pasture renovation after flooding](#)

[Wet weather management handout](#)

[Decision tree for flooded land document](#)