

Fodder Beet grazing guide

Grazing your Fodder Beet crop is the second most important thing to ensure success (the most important thing being the work required establishing it properly)!

Specialty Seeds has produced the following guide to provide you with the key points to help achieve grazing success.

Note: The following points should be thought of as tips only as variations will need to be made from farm to farm, Specialty Seeds and DLF Seeds New Zealand do not accept any liability from actual results achieved.



Before you start grazing.

Fodder beet bulb must be considered as a soluble energy concentrate. The bulb is high in energy (12-13 MJ ME/kg dry matter) and soluble sugars (~60% of DM), and has virtually no fibre.

Changing cows from a grass-based diet to fodder beet therefore requires a transition period. This is to allow rumen bugs to adjust. The danger of poor transition is acidosis, which can occur if animals eat too much bulb and not enough fibre (roughage) in the first 14 days.

The different parts of Fodder beet offer different benefits:

- The **fodder beet bulbs** make up 82-85% of the total crop. For a 25 tonne DM crop the average bulb weight will be about 370 grams DM. They have a DM percentage relative to the variety:
 - Low DM varieties from 9.5 to 13%
 - Mediums from 15-17%.
- The **fodder beet tops** make up 15-18% of total crop. Tops and have feed value, and are similar to high quality pasture in this regard. They provide good levels of protein and energy and more fibre than the bulb (but not enough to be the sole fibre source for cows).

Total crop protein is about 12%, adequate for cows.



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Before transitioning cows onto fodder beet

Here are some tips to help you transition cows onto fodder beet:

- Vaccinate with 5-in-1 before transition.
- Control internal parasites (the crop will have no worm challenge, but a healthy animal will transition better and gain more condition on beet).
- Cows that have not eaten large bulb crops may be wary of fodder beet until they get a taste.
- Also cows that have had a recent history of high grain/concentrate feeding may be more prone to acidosis on beet due to subclinical damage to the rumen.
- Cows may need to be introduced to the hay/baleage before transition begins to ensure they all get an adequate amount during transition.
- Plan how the first days of grazing will work.
- Assess the yield of the crop. The part of the paddock to be grazed in transition is most important. Always use an actual dry matter percentage test of the bulb.
- Revise the feed budget.

Transitioning cows onto fodder beet

Transitioning cows onto fodder beet should last for 14 days.

Don't let cows get hungry before being put on fodder beet during transition. Feed them pasture and hay/straw before moving to beet.

If a long enough break cannot be created, the first beet break will have much more feed per animal than needed, so control the intake of beet with time locked on the crop. Cows need to be given the same time to graze beet, so think about how to speed up access to the break.

Options for the first week, when cows are only meant to eat 1-4 kg DM/day may include;

1. Making a long paddock fence break: allow 1m break per cow.
2. Split herd into smaller mobs and graze at different sides of the paddock.

Cows will initially eat the tops, and these require much less rumen adjustment than bulbs, so intake control is more important once the tops have been grazed off. This is the disadvantage of putting cows on and off the same area for several days, as after the first day they will only have bulb to eat.

On-off grazing is best. On pasture overnight, fresh pasture break in morning and fed hay/straw, then put on beet when they are full, and remove when they have eaten their allocation.

The hay or straw must be palatable (high quality supplement like leafy baleage is not recommended during transition).



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Intake of beet should be increased gradually over the transition, e.g.

- Day 1-2; 1 kg DM/cow
- Day 3-4; 2 kg DM/cow
- Day 5-6; 3 kg DM/cow
- Day 7-8; 4 kg DM/cow
- Day 9-10; 5 kg DM/cow
- Day 11-12; 6 kg DM/cow
- Day 13-14; 7 kg DM/cow

Post-transition

Cows can be kept on the crop, but hay or straw either fed daily or constantly available. Stock water is important (some animals may consume a greater amount of hay, and beet is high in sodium).

Some farmers supplement phosphate throughout winter, but others do not. Get a recommendation from your vet.

Utilisation

Cows pull out bulbs and eat 95-100% of the total crop. Some farmers grub up remnant bulbs after grazing and then graze, but care is needed to still control intake (don't spread cows over the whole paddock).

Coming off fodder beet

Transition cows off 2-3 weeks before calving (on to their normal post-calving feed type) and supplement with magnesium.

Specialty Seeds acknowledges the help given to them by DLF Seeds Ltd New Zealand in the production of this guide.



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