

Feeding in and after flood

# Getting the diet right

**Your milker diet must generate sufficient milk income to achieve a satisfactory margin over feed costs to cover your other costs and support your farm business through recovery.**

The key things to do are:

- Feed your cows to achieve high daily milk production
- Ensure their diet is nutritionally balanced, palatable and safe
- Take care how you introduce pasture back into the diet
- Also provide adequate diets for your dry cows and young stock.

## More milk, more margin

You need to decide what level of milk production you are going to feed for, as this will affect the choices you make in planning the diet. Cows fed to achieve high daily milk production use proportionally less feed to maintain themselves – a greater percentage of feed is used to produce milk and generate income. So more milk means more margin over feed cost to cover operating costs, finance and capital costs.

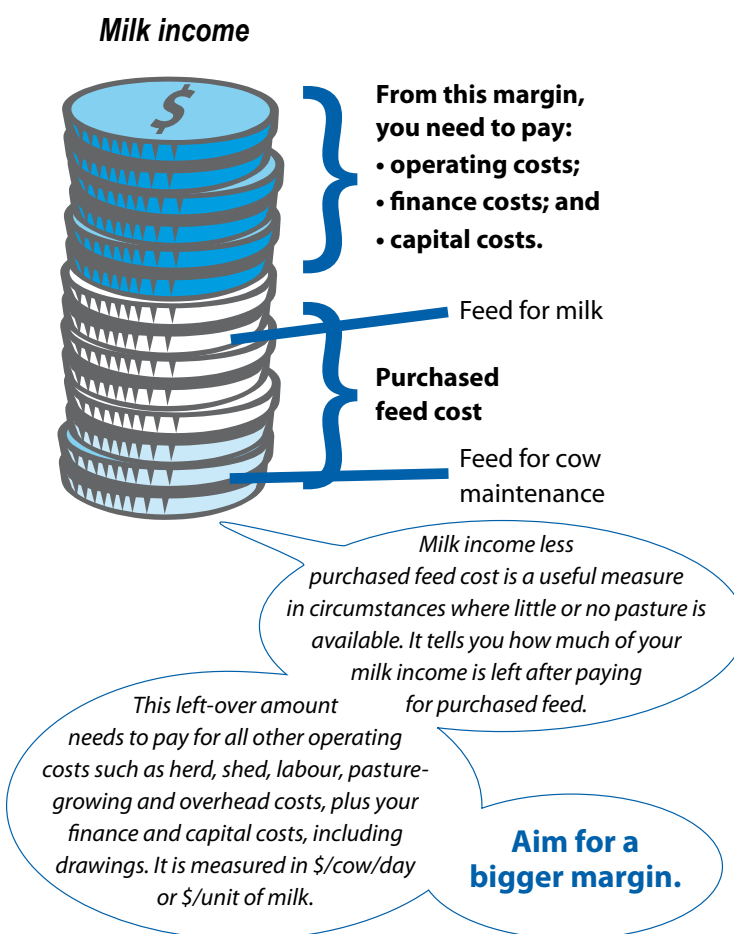
However, if achieving higher milk production and a higher margin means your farm operating costs, finance and capital costs also rise, the result could be the same or even worse. Do a detailed analysis of your farm business' current financial position with a business management consultant before making any significant investment and assess the impact on farm profitability and cash flow.

## Feed a nutritionally balanced diet

A cow's diet is primarily made up of energy, protein and fibre. It is the proportions of each that determine whether the diet is nutritionally balanced. The guidelines on the next page are the basis for a high-production diet.

Make sure you also provide nutritionally adequate diets to your young stock and dry cows.

- Have you explored options to agist young stock in other regions?



# Getting the diet right

Nutrient	Rec. level	Nutrient	Rec. level
Crude protein	16-18%	Undegradable Dietary Protein (UDP)	35% of the total crude protein
Non-fibrous carbohydrate (NFC)	34-42%	Sugar	4-8%
		Starch	22-28%
		Soluble Fibre	7%
Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF)	30-35%	Effective NDF	>22%
Crude fat	0-5%		
Minerals, vitamins, buffers, rumen modifiers, other additives	Speak to a nutrition specialist		

## What feedstuffs to use?

- Use ingredients in your diet that are good quality and value, palatable, and free of toxins and chemical residues.
- There is little room for guessing, so get a feed test on a representative sample of each ingredient.
- If purchasing a commercial concentrate mix or pellet to feed with hay/silage, make sure the protein content is adequate. If you are able to mix your own grain/concentrates, consider using high-quality protein sources, such as canola, soymeal or cottonseed meal. Urea can be used, but only with extreme caution – seek advice first.

## Calculate purchased feed cost

Once you know what feed ingredients are available and at what price, it is time to formulate a milker diet that will generate a satisfactory milk income less purchased feed cost for you. Aim for a thrifty diet, but don't go as far as feeding the least cost per tonne or per cow as it is unlikely to give you enough milk production to generate a decent margin. If you need help, consult a nutrition adviser.

## Manage risks

- **Ruminal upsets / acidosis**
  - Ensure the milker diet's effective fibre level is adequate
  - Consider including buffers and rumen modifiers in your grain / concentrate or mixed ration.
  - Avoid any sudden changes in diet. When regenerated pasture and fodder crops are ready to graze, introduce them back into the cows' diet in stages over 2-3 weeks and make appropriate adjustments to supplements.
  - Consider other acidosis risk factors.
  - Use quick checks to assess how your cows are coping with the diet, including milk fat and protein tests, rumen fill, cud chewing and manure consistency.

- **Moulds and mycotoxins**

- Avoid feeding any mouldy feed to cows.
- Consider including a mycotoxin binder feed additive in your grain / concentrate or mixed ration – consult your nutrition adviser.
- Introduce new feeds slowly over several days, while monitoring for any feed rejection, drop in milk production, milk composition or changes in cow health. If you have any concerns, consult your vet immediately.

- **Botulism**

- Be aware of the risk of botulism from cows eating rotting organic matter. Consider vaccination.

- **Toxic plants**

- Closely monitor pasture regrowth and identify any unknown plant species that may be toxic. Avoid grazing hungry stock on high-risk pastures.

## Check your feed conversion efficiency

How many litres of milk are your cows producing for every kilogram of feed dry matter offered? 1.5 L, 1.25 L or only 1 L?

Weigh all the components of your diet and calculate your herd's current feed conversion efficiency.

If it is below 1.2 L/kg DM consider:

- Are your cows just not eating enough to achieve higher levels of feed conversion efficiency?
- Are they using some of their feed input to put on body condition?
- Is your milker diet not well balanced?
- Are you wasting excessive feed during feed-out?

If unsure, consult a nutrition adviser.

Visit Murray Dairy's website ([www.murraydairy.com.au](http://www.murraydairy.com.au)) for more information about:

- Nutrition and feeding management
- Feed conversion efficiency and how to optimise it