

ASSESSING YOUR RISK OF ACIDOSIS

In normal circumstances your herd may not be at high risk of developing ruminal acidosis. However, where fodder shortages force many farmers to change their feeding practices, checking your acidosis risk is important.

Use the *Ruminal acidosis risk assessment* fact sheet to make sure you are not inadvertently putting your operation at high risk of acidosis and disrupting rumen function in cows. Read the options in the three columns of this grid and highlight the box that best describes what happens on your farm.

Herd	This part of the assessment gets you to think about the profile of your herd. Some animals (like first calvers) are more vulnerable than others.
Feeds	This part looks at what you are feeding and feed storage. It spells out amounts or levels that can affect your acidosis risk.
Feeding management	This part looks at risks associated with the way you feed your herd. How and when cows are fed, as well as what is fed, influence risk.



Assessing risk

HIGH risk red zone

Cows put onto ryegrass pasture at one-leaf stage

Grain/concentrate feeding once a day or every second or third day

Poor control over the quantities of feed dispensed to each cow by the dairy feeding system

Significant separation of feed ingredients and additives by the dairy feeding system

Flat feeding rate to cows in dairy

Changes to the amount and types of feed made abruptly

Cows hungry when given unrestricted access to large amounts of feed

Poor transition feeding program so cows and heifers are not well adjusted to grain/concentrate when they enter the milking herd

Capacity to feed grain/concentrate in dairy only, separate to forages

Inconsistent daily feeding routine, with great variation in timing and amounts fed

Long intervals between feeding of forages and grain/concentrate each day

Restricted feed space outside the dairy for forages and high-fibre by-products



HOW THE PROCESS MIGHT HELP

'Well I'm keen to deal with my red risky areas but I'm not sure I can do much about the first one. What am I going to do for 14 days while I'm waiting for the third leaf to grow?! The consultant will earn his money helping me out on this one!

Doing something about my second red area is easy I'll just introduce that new feed I bought a bit more slowly than I planned.

With the last one, I think I'll have to draft the heifers out in the shed and give them a separate paddock. Not ideal but the drought's not ideal, is it?'

Acidosis – do you know how to do a risk assessment?

Moving from a high-risk level (red zone) to a lower-risk level (orange or green) doesn't always need to be expensive.

For instance, the list below contains ideas for changing to a lower risk feeding system.

- Plan ahead to make feeding change slowly over a couple of weeks.
- Introduce a transition diet during the last 2–3 weeks before calving for both cows and heifers to get them used to the diet they will be eating after they calve. There is a good chance this will easily pay for itself in higher milk production.
- Some high fibre by-products can be fed in the paddock. Just make sure all animals get free access to the feed.
- If pasture in the paddock is plentiful, don't hold the cows back after milking. Let them head to the paddock to reduce the time between grain/concentrate and forage feeding. However, if the pasture in the paddock is only enough for about 2–3 hours grazing, hold cows back after milking and offer them some hay or silage while waiting, then allow them to head to the paddock as a herd.

Even the simple management changes can make a difference.

Once aware of the risks, many farmers can come up with ideas and strategies tailored to their situation.

Sometimes, taking action isn't hard but it might mean feeding a little differently.

Help is available

Go to the **Ruminal acidosis risk assessment** fact sheet for further information. Talk to your trusted advisor if you are still unsure.



RISK ASSESSMENT

'I've had a look at the risk assessment and I am in the red zone four times in the 'Feeds' section alone!

If I look carefully, I think the combination of 5kg palm kernel and 5kg wheat is a problem. Too much of the fibre is too short, the NDF is too low with the fresher grass, the crusher is set a little fine and I've just dumped the palm kernel outside.

Well, I can reset the crusher and shift the palm kernel into the empty hay shed. That will fix two problems. Perhaps I could swap the hay I'm feeding the heifers with some palm kernel I'm feeding the cows. I don't think the heifers will mind a bit of palm kernel and the cows will likely respond well to the increase in long fibre.'

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please visit feed.dairyaustralia.com.au