

In normal circumstances your herd may not be high risk of developing acidosis. However, drought conditions force many farmers to change their feeding practices. Use the **Risk Assessment Grid – Factors affecting rumen function & risk of acidosis** (Fact Sheet C – to get a copy, go to www.dairyaustralia.com.au) to make sure you are not inadvertently putting your operation at high risk.

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 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 suddenly	✓
Cows hungry when given unrestricted access to large amounts of feed in paddock or elsewhere	
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 3rd 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

- For one-on-one support, contact an adviser. This may be a DPI extension officer, nutritionist, local veterinarian or farm management consultant.
- Find out how other farmers are working through the issues at feed.FIBRE.future workshops in your area. Contact the Drought Response hotline on 1800 050 015, your regional drought response co-ordinator or go to www.dairyaustralia.com.au for details.
- To learn how to better solve the problem yourself, check out farmer courses in your area. Contact the National Centre for Dairy Education – Australia for more information. Go to www.ncdea.edu.au/farming.

"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 5 kg palm kernel and 5 kg 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."

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know where
to begin?
Talk it over**

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