



Leigh Thompson

70 Acres, Dairy Farming - Feilding

Leigh first took over the running of the farm in 1982 and subsequently inherited a major bloat problem that plagued the farm for a further 12 years. Although he continued farming with the crisis, he never gave up trying to find the best solution that would not only benefit the stock's health, but increase his production as well.

"By the early '90's, nearly half the herd had stab wounds and some even had up to 4 scars on their sides. Over those years I experimented with nitrogen use and various other fertilisers, assuming that the bloat solution was in the rates of application or the type that I used. But it didn't seem to change anything, and by the end of it, the cows had that much acid in their urine, that in summer it would burn the grass and make it go brown before your eyes," says Leigh.

"I used to have to shift the cattle three times a day, and during the night I would have to go out every hour, on the hour, until eleven or twelve o'clock to make sure that the cows had settled down for the night and that none of them were suffering.

People used to tell me that I couldn't be drenching. But I used to give each cow double the recommended dose of bloat drench, twice a day, and in some cases, I still had to stab them. We had quite a few Friesians and Jerseys in the herd in the 80's, but we found they were just as prone to bloat as the Ayrshires.

I also took soil tests and herbage tests, but the "experts" virtually came up with nothing. Even my vet, who had practised in the Waikato, commented it was the worst bloat problem he had ever seen," Leigh recalls.

"By the mid '90's I decided to totally change the manure programme I was using, and that's when I first began using Hatuma dicalcic phosphate.

Coincidentally, the year after I applied the first dressing on the farm, I read a testimonial in a Hatuma Update from a farmer in the Wairarapa who said that his bloat problem had disappeared after using dicalcic phosphate. This encouraged me and helped confirm what I was trying to achieve.



During the '99-'00 season Leigh and Shirley had the top Ayrshire herd in the Central Districts (excluding Taranaki)



Admittedly, after the first 3 years I didn't see much difference. But by the fourth year the bloat problem had virtually disappeared, and these days I haven't had a need to drench one cow. For the last 3 seasons, production has increased with most seasons averaging between 350-380 milk solids per cow, at 3 cows per hectare.

The clover is still in amongst the pasture in good quantities. During the bloat days, the "experts" suggested that I should get more grass than clover amongst the pasture, but it has never changed, with our pasture still having a very good percentage of clover. Nowadays, I can put cows into it and feel comfortable that none of them will suffer any bloat problems - if someone had told me I could do that six years ago, I would never had believed them!

This year we had a drought, milked through to mid May, was virtually short of feed like everyone else, and then, to top it off, we had a series of frosts. But come July / August, the grass just shot away, and now in early September, I'm almost embarrassed with the amount of feed I've got! And it has all come from using absolutely no nitrogen as well. Farmers that I talk to, who stick on extra nitrogen in rough times, say that their grass is now growing and their place is coming away. But mine is

doing exactly the same thing, at exactly the same time, without having to spend an extra cent on more fertiliser!

I haven't applied potash since the early '80's, and I only feed the cows an extra bit of meal as supplementary feed.

Over the years I haven't done anything differently - I've just changed my fertiliser to Hatuma dicalcic phosphate. Even milk fever has reduced to the extent of only one or two cows a season since using it.

Of all the things I've used, dicalcic phosphate has been the best decision I've made. Without the bloat (and the stress that went with it) it has certainly made milking cows more enjoyable!"

