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the ongoing unavailability of Kexxtone

It's important to address how this impacts transition cow strategies on farm...

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TOMORROW'S FARMER

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YOUR **NEWSLETTER** FROM **CREDITON MILLING COMPANY**

Nitrogen planning – we still have a lot to gain

MARK TUCKER 07703734530
FORAGE SPECIALIST

Applied nitrogen—from fertiliser, slurry, FYM, biological fixation and purchased feed—often exceeds what is actually utilised by crops. That gap, known as nitrogen use efficiency (NUE), is the key to understanding both lost value and environmental impact.

FORAGE

Studies of intensive grassland farms have shown average nitrogen surpluses as high as 175 kg N/ha—that's 140 units/acre in old money. This means the bad news is NUE values can be as low as 23%. A staggering three-quarters of the nitrogen entering the system isn't captured in grass or silage—or put another way, you are only farming with a quarter of what is in the system. Across the UK, the national surplus averages 83 kg N/ha, but this hides significant differences between farm types. Some can be as high as 220 kg N/ha, with the best arable practices as low as 30 kg N/ha. Arable systems are typically more efficient due to their lack of livestock. Grassland-based dairy farms—particularly those importing nitrogen via feed—tend to leave a far bigger footprint.

Livestock systems are inherently more complex. This is because, in addition to bagged fertiliser and on-farm manures, bought-in feed brings considerable additional nitrogen.

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FORAGE

Without integrating all these sources into a joined-up nutrient plan, it's easy to end up over-applying—which is where the huge gap in nitrogen utilisation can appear.

This inefficiency shows up in multiple ways: nitrogen that's applied 'just in case', every 30 days because Dad always did it; poor accounting for clover fixation due to lack of sward assessments; and uneven slurry applications all widen the gap (this is where slurry testing can be a useful tool). Every kilogram of unused nitrogen represents not only wasted spend, but increased costs on purchased proteins. The yield and quality loss also shouldn't be ignored. Then there are the environmental issues—whether this is through ammonia loss, nitrate leaching, or denitrification in wet, compacted soils.

Practical steps can help close this gap. Starting with realistic estimates of manure nutrient content—based on livestock numbers, volumes, storage, and field histories—enables more accurate fertiliser decisions. Fields closer to the farm historically have higher indices by default and require next to no additional livestock manures. This can also be expanded to crop-specific fields.

Maize, as a continuous crop, will build indices faster than most others due to returning a large amount back to the soil during harvest. Adjusting nitrogen applications based on previous inputs and targeted to field use—silage aftermaths, grazed paddocks, or reseeds—will all need different approaches.

Timing and method matter too. Moving away from splash plates and applying slurry with low-emission equipment reduces losses dramatically. Fields with clover should be treated differently, and those receiving multiple cuts should be reviewed between harvests.

When ammonium nitrate is applied, the clover plant can readily absorb this nitrogen from the soil. This makes it less necessary for the clover to invest energy in fixing its own nitrogen, and thus leads to more wastage from the system.

At CMC, we support farms in making better use of applied nitrogen through targeted nutrient management planning with NavigatePro. This cloud-based tool builds whole-farm plans based on real nutrient flows, crop demands and field use, with flexibility to adjust as the season progresses.

To push efficiency further, we offer a range of proven and forward-thinking products that help retain more nitrogen in the soil, reduce losses, and improve uptake. From amendments that stabilise nutrients in manured soils to bio-based products that support root-microbe function, we help close the loop between input and output.

Nitrogen planning isn't just about applying less—it's about using what's already on farm to better effect. There's still a lot to gain.

Where has all the Kexxtone gone?

STUART GOUGH 07854 955778
RUMINANT DEVELOPMENT

With recent discussions around dry cow management gaining momentum, it's important to address the ongoing unavailability of Kexxtone and how this impacts transition cow strategies on farm.

DAIRY

As of July 2024, marketing authorisation for Kexxtone has been suspended across the UK and EU. Kexxtone, a slow-release Monensin bolus, was widely used to reduce ketosis risk by shifting rumen fermentation towards glucose production via propionate. It was especially useful in high-risk cows—those over- or under-conditioned, lame, or carrying twins.

The decision to withdraw it came after manufacturing changes led to an increase in regurgitated boluses containing active Monensin. This not only reduced the product's reliability but also created a risk to dogs exposed to discarded boluses. Coupled with growing pressure to reduce antibiotic use in food-producing animals, the product was already under close scrutiny.

Its removal presents an opportunity to re-centre the conversation on transition management. As ever, getting the basics right is essential: well-managed body condition, stress-free environments, and good rumen fill are non-negotiable. Without these in place, no additive will deliver results.

In the absence of Kexxtone, protected choline boluses and other nutritional tools are stepping into focus. Methyl donors—such as choline, methionine and betaine—have strong peer-reviewed support for their role in managing fat mobilisation and supporting liver function. Most research is based on daily inclusion through compound feed or pre-mixes, but bolus forms are becoming increasingly accessible and relevant.

At CMC, we're supporting our customers with two robust transition solutions:

Dry Cow MaxMec™ delivers total metabolic support using the proven MecoVit® blend of methionine, choline, betaine and B-vitamins. This supports liver detox and energy partitioning, while **Zinpro Availa® ECM (chromium)** provides organic trace minerals including chromium to aid insulin sensitivity and immune function.

Dry Cow IsoBoost™ targets fibre digestibility through the inclusion of Zinpro IsoFerm® and Zinpro Availa® ECM (chromium) —a rumen-directed isoacid additive that feeds fibre-digesting microbes. This promotes rumen stability and increases post-calving intake, especially where forage quality or dry matter intakes are variable.

Both products are designed to be fed for the final 21 days pre-calving and are available in roll, nut and meal format with a complete dry cow mineral pack included.

As always, start with the fundamentals. Tools like mobility scoring and BCS monitoring help identify at-risk groups, and once the basics are in place, targeted nutrition can provide real gains.

The loss of Kexxtone is a challenge, but it's also a chance to promote better practice and broader engagement with transition cow health.

We're here to help you navigate that change.

Helping laying hens through the heat

WILL WHITE 07545 504138
POULTRY SPECIALIST

When the temperature climbs, it's not just us feeling the heat—laying hens can really struggle too. Hot weather knocks their feed intake, stresses them out, and often hits egg production.

POULTRY

With summers getting hotter and heatwaves now a regular feature, it's worth getting ahead of the game. Here are six straightforward ways to help your birds stay healthy and productive through the warmer spells.

Top up with electrolytes
Hens lose a lot of salts when they're panting to stay cool, and that can quickly lead to dehydration. Adding electrolytes to their water—especially sodium, potassium and chloride—helps keep them balanced. A dose of vitamins C and E in the mix can also support recovery and reduce stress. It's best to get started before a hot spell kicks in, not just once it's already baking.

Keep water cool and easy to access
Water is absolutely critical in the heat. Birds will drink more, but if the water's too warm or lines are sluggish, they'll back off. Try flushing the lines first thing and again mid-afternoon to keep it under 20°C if you can. Check all the drinkers are working properly and think about adding extras if there's any crowding. Keep an eye out for pale combs, slow birds, or poor feed intake—they're often the first signs of dehydration.

Make the environment low-stress
The less your birds move, the less heat they generate. Simple enrichment—pecking blocks, shaded dust baths, or low perches in cooler spots—can help them stay calm and settled. Keep things quiet during the hottest part of the day and avoid unnecessary handling or movement. Spread things out to stop them bunching and overheating.

Get air moving
Good ventilation makes a huge difference. If you've got natural airflow, open up where you can—ridge vents, side panels, whatever helps shift the hot air out. In mechanical systems, double-check fans are clean and running well, and make sure airflow is reaching the birds, not just circulating above them. Reducing stocking density helps too, if you've got the room.

Let them cool at night
The night is your window to help hens cool down properly. Keep fans running or open up sheds if possible to pull in cooler air. Birds need a few hours under 25°C to properly recover from the day's heat—this helps reset their appetite and keeps egg quality on track.

Keep an eye on Red Mite
Warm weather's a dream for red mite, and infestations make heat stress worse. Mites feed at night and disturb rest, which really knocks the birds about. Check perch ends and housing joints regularly and act quickly if you spot signs. Diatomaceous earth, heat treatments or approved chemicals all have their place—just don't let it get ahead of you. Dry litter and clean housing help keep the pressure down.