

Webinar summary: Post-calving performance - Energy

This webinar looks at how farmers can support cows after calving through a focus on appetite, rumen stability, liver health, and energy balance. It highlights how to combine visual assessments, wearable data, and blood tests to get a full picture of recovery, and covers how feed quality, mineral balance, and practical nutritional strategies help cows cycle, milk, and regain condition efficiently.

In this webinar:

1. Three ways to monitor recovery

- *Visual checks* – rumen fill, body condition, cow behaviour, and manure consistency give quick insights into appetite and digestion.
- *Wearable data* – rumination and eating minutes show how smoothly cows recover post-calving. Smooth, quick rebounds signal good transition feeding; erratic or slow recovery often points to energy or liver issues.
- *Blood indicators* – calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, NEFA, BHBA, GPX, and other markers reveal mineral balance, fat mobilisation, liver health, and immune resilience.

2. Appetite phases

- *Freshly calved cows (first few days)* – appetite is influenced by condition gain/loss during the dry period, transition diet quality, and mineral balance.
- *Lactating cows* – appetite depends more on rumen stability, feed quality, and liver function.

3. Cow behaviour and manure as warning signs

- Idle or “sad-looking” cows, dull eyes, or rough coats suggest energy or mineral imbalance.
- Loose, bubbly, or watery manure with undigested fibre points to rumen instability or hindgut fermentation, meaning feed energy is being lost.

4. Wearables for early warning

- Good recovery shows as only a small dip in rumination and appetite that rebounds within days.
- Poor recovery appears as erratic or delayed rebounds, often caused by over-conditioned cows, poor transition diets, or inconsistent feeding.

5. Blood results and what they reveal

- Mineral imbalances (especially too much magnesium lowering calcium and phosphorus) can lead to downer cows.
- NEFA and BHBA together show whether fat mobilisation is being handled well by the liver.

- Low GPX alongside high ketones signals immune stress and higher risk of metritis or endometritis.

6. Pasture and seasonal feed challenges

- Late winter grass: low dry matter, lower energy, faster passage through the rumen, and higher levels of unsaturated fatty acids that stress microbes.
- Early spring grass: high protein and sugar, but still low dry matter and minerals like calcium and phosphorus. Supplementation and diet balancing are essential.

7. Feeding the rumen to feed the cow

- Soluble sugars spark microbial activity, starch maintains energy supply, and fibre provides longer-lasting fuel. Balancing these fractions supports stable rumen pH and feed conversion efficiency.

8. Nutritional levers for recovery

- Rumen buffers and live yeast to stabilise digestion.
- Good quality silage to drive appetite post-calving.
- Strategic use of sugar (molasses, lactose, by-products) to correct subclinical ketosis.
- Starch sources (wheat, maize, barley) to support milk protein and reduce high milk urea.
- Palm kernel and specific fatty acids (C16, C18:1) to aid condition and reproduction, while avoiding imbalance.

For more details, watch the webinar or download the slide deck.