



Winter Grazing Action Group

Winter grazing and animal welfare – what's my role?

Winter grazing is complex and requires planning and management all year round. Animal welfare in winter grazing systems can be influenced by actions across the supply chain. It's important that everyone involved is aware of their influence and are working to improve animal welfare in winter grazing systems.

The intention of this document is to provide guidance for those along the supply chain who can have an impact on the welfare of animals during winter grazing. It contains guidance and suggestions for:

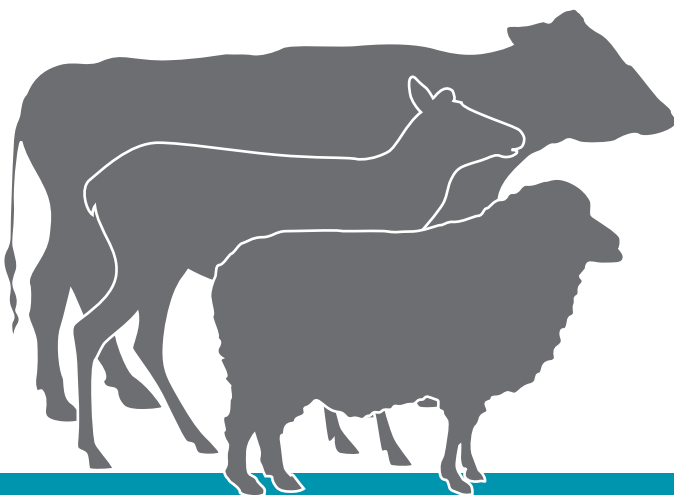
- Farmers and farm staff
- Veterinarians
- Graziers
- Farm consultants and advisers
- Contractors
- Stock agents
- Retailers (e.g. seeds and agrichemicals)
- Finance (banks/accountants)

This document should be read in conjunction with the Winter Grazing Action Group [Expected outcomes for animal welfare](#).

This document was developed through a collaborative effort of the Action Group members. Every winter grazing system is different, and this document is intended as a starting point only.

For more information on systems check the levy-body websites, or contact your local extension officer.

- Deer Industry NZ – [Wintering Feed Systems](#)
- DairyNZ – [Wintering](#)
- Beef+Lamb NZ – [Winter Grazing](#)



Farmers and farm staff

Farmers and farm staff are legally responsible for the welfare of animals and have directly control over what the resources animals are able to access such as shelter and water. Have a written winter grazing management plan in place and work with your team of advisers to ensure good outcomes for your livestock in winter.

| Spring | Summer |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with your advisers to plan crop sowing for next season – take along any lessons learned from your debrief session. You can invite your advisers to join your team debrief.• Work with seed retailer and contractor regarding choice of different crop types, paddock location, soil testing and plans for procurement. Consider placement of baleage in crop paddocks and covered storage for hay and straw. Best practice suggests soil testing is done up to 6 months before the crop paddock is selected and crop is planted. The farm consultant is often involved in this planning process.• Ensure crop areas do not exceed areas required by your local regional council or national standards, if so, apply for a consent.• Develop a full feed budget for the following winter based on planned areas of crop.• Meet with your vet at the end of lambing or calving to determine what worked well and what didn't with regard to lambing or calving e.g. physical KPI around lamb or calf losses and incidence of metabolic disease.• Develop a plan for each paddock to be cultivated showing areas to be cultivated (and areas not to be cultivated). Keep animal welfare in mind when considering baleage placement, shelter, water access etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalise written grazing contract with grazier (if grazing stock off farm) with key animal welfare responsibilities included.• Get your herd pregnancy scanned early – this enables the scanner to give an estimated calving or lambing date for every individual animal. Ask for a copy of the calving and lambing date report to be sent directly to your grazier if appropriate.• Once your supplement is harvested (and pre-placed if appropriate), review your expected crop yield results to create a draft winter feed budget.• Get the herd body condition scored by a certified assessor to determine dry-off dates for each animal. Body condition score ewes pre-mating to allow targeted feed allocation for lighter or heavier conditioned ewes.• Work with your advisers to create a crop transition plan – including transition onto crop, and transition back to pasture in time for calving/lambing, and how to manage adverse event transitions. |

Autumn

- Finalise paddock plan for each crop paddock
- Double-check feed budget, exclusion areas, grazing direction, stock water access and adverse weather plans. including movement of stock off crop paddocks and shelter allocation.
- Check different allocation of amounts of feed, type of crops and supplements for different classes of stock.
- Accurately assess the dry matter yield in early May and make a plan to address any shortages if the yield is lower than expected.
- Discuss options for feed testing supplements and crop with your seed merchant or vet, including crop nitrate testing immediately pre-grazing.
- Hold a pre-grazing training session with all farm staff – ensure everyone knows the wintering plan (including individual paddock plans), how to recognise if things aren't going quite right, and what to do in those situations. Invite your vet and/or consultant to be proactively involved in this process.
- Dry off cows according to body condition score and calving date. Pay extra close attention to animals during transition onto crop.
- Book your seed retailer or other adviser to measure the crop yields for each paddock, and supplements.

Winter

- For high-risk crops, ensure the dry matter yield is accurately assessed immediately before grazing to allow proper allocation and avoid transition issues.
- Finalise stock arrival arrangements with grazier, ensure that all NAIT info is updated on departure and when the stock return.
- Reviewing autumn mineral testing results with your vet and discuss whether additional mineral supplementation is appropriate over winter.
- Check animals at least once daily and call your vet quickly if you see any animals showing signs of ill health. More frequent checks are required during the first two weeks that stock are on crop.
- Regularly review your grazing plan according to weather and ground conditions.
- Scan ewes to find dries and allocate winter feed to singles or multiples.
- Body condition score ewes at scanning to improve allocation of winter feeds.
- Check any stock grazing off fortnightly during the winter.
- Late winter – Hold a post-winter debrief with farm staff – what went well? What could be done differently next winter to make things go even better?
- Meet with your adviser(s) to plan crop sowing for next season – take along any lessons learned from your debrief session. You can invite your adviser(s) to join your team debrief.



Graziers are legally responsible for the welfare of animals in their care during winter. Communicate with your clients to ensure clear expectations by having a written grazing contract in place.

| Spring | Summer |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with your advisers and the clients (stock owners) you'll be working with next year to plan crop sowing for next season – take along any lessons learned from your debrief session. Ensure crop areas do not exceed areas required by your local regional council or national standards, if so, apply for a consent. • Work with seed retailer and contractor regarding choice of different crop types, paddock location, soil testing and plans for procurement and placement of baleage in crop paddocks and covered storage for hay and straw. Best practice is soil testing is done up to 6 months before the crop paddock is selected and crop is planted. The farm consultant is often involved in this planning process. • Ensure crop areas do not exceed areas required by your local regional council or national standards, if so, apply for a consent. • Develop a plan for each paddock, showing areas to be (and not to be) cultivated. Keep animal welfare in mind when considering baleage placement, shelter, water access etc. • Set up a feed budget for next winter based on planned crop areas and stock classes expected to be on farm. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise written grazing contract with clients with key animal welfare responsibilities included. • Straw will become available soon – check if you require more straw and order with contractors. • Ask your clients to provide you a copy of their herd calving date report/short gestation semen use – this enables you to identify early-calving cows and ensure they are transitioned off crop in time for calving. • Ask your clients to provide you a copy of their crop transition plan – including transition onto crop, and transition back to pasture in time for calving/lambing. Ask where they will be transitioning them livestock the lead-up to winter. • Once your supplement is harvested (and pre-placed if appropriate), review your crop yield results to create a draft winter feed budget. Check if your clients would like your supplements to be feed tested. |
| Autumn | Winter |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise winter grazing plan (paddock plan for each crop paddock) double-check feed budget, exclusion areas, grazing direction, stock water access and adverse weather plan; use a winter grazing checklist/plan including movement of stock off crop paddocks and shelter allocation. • Hold a pre-grazing training session with all farm staff – ensure everyone knows the plan, and what to do if things aren't going quite right. • Pay extra close attention to animals during transition onto crop. • Book in with your seed retailer to dry matter yield your crops. Ask if your clients require feed testing of crops, including nitrate testing, and if supplementary feeds are to be feed tested if not already done. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise stock arrival arrangements with grazer, ensure that all NAIT info is updated on arrival. • Ask if your client would consider engaging their (or your) vet or consultant to proactively walk through the transitioning stock classes during the first two weeks on crop. • Follow crop transition plan – including transition onto crop, and transition back to pasture in time for calving/lambing. • Check animals at least once daily and call your vet if you see any animals showing signs of ill health. More frequent checks are required during the first two weeks the stock are on crop. • Provide regular (at least fortnightly) updates to clients about how their animals are doing. • Regularly review your grazing plan according to weather and ground conditions. • Ensure that NAIT info is updated as stock leave. • Hold a post-winter debrief with farm staff – what went well? What could be done differently next winter to make things go even better? |

Veterinarians

Veterinarians play a key role supporting their clients to achieve good animal health and welfare. Talk with your farmers about winter grazing throughout the year. If they use a consultant or other adviser ask whether you could collaborate with them on issues relating to animals such as transition planning, body condition scoring and feed budgeting

| Spring | Summer |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review how calving or lambing has progressed, weaknesses or concerns e.g. metabolic disease and what might be done differently next year.• Remind clients about which supplements best meet requirements for stock on crop e.g. better quality pasture or lucerne baleage for young and heavily pregnant stock classes.• Discuss crop selection for the following winter (likely the consultant or retailer has already made these decisions with client). Check types of crops likely to or that have been established. Remind client about soil testing and necessary care with starter fertiliser selection to minimise risk of brassica animal health disorders (risks of high sulphur fertilisers, using DAP only). | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At pregnancy scan, check with herd owner whether a copy of calving date report should be sent directly to the grazier. Emphasise need for early scanning to grouping of ewes and dairy cows on the basis of expected calving and lambing date.• At annual farm planning session, discuss winter grazing including feed transition, adverse weather planning, and mineral requirements. |
| Autumn | Winter |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During the dry-off consult, discuss wintering plans with reference to mastitis risks and value of internal teat sealants.• Use a winter planning checklist to plan grazing details. The levy bodies and regional councils have templates for farmers to use.• Discuss requirements for macro and trace mineral products likely to be needed for crop fed stock. Arrange to check trace mineral status of stock that will be wintering on crop.• Discuss options for feed testing supplements and crop, including crop nitrate testing.• Check that a full feed budget is in place and review budget components• Offer to take part in staff training before stock go on crop, retraining on signs of nitrate, acidosis, brassica bloat and contingency planning should animal health issues arise.• Discuss crop transition and managing adverse events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When reviewing autumn mineral testing results, discuss winter grazing plan and whether additional mineral supplementation is appropriate.• Offer a proactive visit to the farm to check stock well-being during the first two weeks of transitioning onto crop.• Respond to inappropriate incidences or prevalence of clinical disease. If a grazing crop has contributed to an animal health/welfare issue you attend, make appt with grazier/owner/farm consultants and review what went wrong.• Contact the seed retailer merchant and the wholesale seed supplier to report an adverse event (as you would for medicines). |

Farm consultants and advisers

Farm consultants are an important part of winter grazing and are influential in achieving good welfare outcomes. You will often be providing the formal feed budgeting and winter planning for clients and can discuss winter management throughout the year.

| Spring | Summer |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider facilitating a post-winter debrief for your clients' staff and wider farm consultancy team – what went well? What could be done differently next winter to make things go even better?• Meet with your clients to plan crop sowing for next season – ask them to pre-prepare by holding a team debrief session and create a list of any lessons learned from last winter.• Ensure crop areas do not exceed areas required by your local regional council or national standards. Ensure your clients are aware if they need to seek resource consent.• Meet with your seed retailer and contractor regarding crop planning and establishment. Review what went well or not so well agronomically with the winters crop.• Set up a feed budget for next winter based on planned crop areas and stock classes expected to be on farm.• Plan where your client will source baleage, hay and straw from for next winter. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At pregnancy scan, check with herd owner whether a copy of calving date report should be sent directly to the grazier.• At annual farm planning session, include dry period when discussing the adverse weather plan.• Ask your clients whether they would be happy for you to collaborate with their vet on issues related to animals – such as transition planning, body condition scoring, and feed budgeting.• Encourage / facilitate written grazing contracts where required. |
| Autumn | Winter |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalise clients' winter grazing plans – double-check feed budgets, exclusion areas, grazing direction, stock water access and adverse weather plans including movement of stock off crop and shelter access as required.• Consider facilitating a pre-grazing training session for your clients' farm staff – ensure everyone knows the plan, and what to do if things aren't going quite right. Consider inviting your client's vet to the meeting also. <p>Check with client that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trace mineral status of animals is being checked by vet.• Macromineral requirements e.g. magnesium, phosphorus are being planned for and product is ordered.• The seed retailer is booked into DM yield crops in May, encourage your client to request feed testing for supplementary feeds and winter crops, including a nitrate test pre-grazing.• When reviewing autumn mineral testing results, discuss winter grazing plan and whether additional mineral supplementation is appropriate.• Dairy heifers and cows are booked to be body condition scored before going onto crop. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check-in regularly with your farmers – is the grazing plan working? Have adverse weather interventions been used? Any animal health issues? Offer to proactively visit and walk through stock on crop particularly during the first two weeks on crop.• Plan spring rotation for when animals return to home farm.• Late winter consider facilitating a post-winter debrief for your clients' staff – what went well? What could be done differently next winter to make things go even better?• Meet with your clients to plan crop sowing for next season – ask them to pre-prepare by holding a team debrief session and create a list of any lessons learned from last winter. |

Contractors

Cultivation has a big influence on the success of crop-based wintering. Working with your farmer clients to ensure paddocks are cultivated with management strategies in place will reduce the risk to animals and environment.

| Spring | Summer |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can protect your business and your reputation by ensuring you have all the information required before you start. A conversation with your client or manager before you start cultivating a paddock will put your mind at ease and prevent any future complications.• Consider having a joint meeting between you, your client, and seed retailer to cover all requirements for next year's winter crop including appropriate crop rotations.• Ask farmer for their paddock plan identifying areas to be cultivated. Discuss paddock cultivation areas as required.• Discuss the cultivation technique, as these can have differing impacts on soil structure and therefore animal welfare.• Check with your client that proposed crop areas do not exceed areas required by their local regional council or national requirements.• Review with your client what worked well last winter, the crop yield, if there are any concerns and what can be improved for this coming year.• Check if your client plans to establish oats or another greenfeed forage behind the winter crops next winter. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When spraying or applying fertiliser to crop paddocks, think about whether there are any risk factors which could be a problem during grazing – look at slope, buffer zone, shelter and tractor access. |
| Autumn | Winter |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When spraying or applying fertiliser to crop paddocks, think about whether there are any risk factors which could be a problem during grazing – look at slope, buffer zone, shelter and tractor access. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review outcomes from cultivation – what went well? What could be done differently next winter to make things go even better?• Check in with your client as to feedback on how crops are going, are DM yields meeting their expectations. |

Stock agents

Stock agents who arrange off-farm grazing have a big influence on animal welfare. Ensure all the grazing you arrange is with written grazing contracts in place, with clear expectations for animal welfare outlined.

Spring

- Prior to transport of stock back to their home farm, check that they are being managed according to the transition plan – and that the receiving farm is set up to follow this plan.

Summer

- Encourage and facilitate written grazing contracts with clear responsibilities and expectations for animal welfare.

Autumn

- Prior to transport of stock to grazing, check that they are being managed according to the transition plan – and that the receiving farm is set up to follow this plan.
- When animals are moved, ensure they are accompanied by copies of the herd calving date report, transition plan, winter grazing plan including adverse event/ contingency info, grazing contract, and animal records (NAIT)

Winter

- Check-in regularly with your clients, particularly as animals are transitioned onto crop – are there any animals which need alternative grazing (e.g. if not adjusting to crop)?
- Ensure grazing clients are utilising their contingency plans for poor weather as needed.



Retailers (including seeds and agrichemicals)

Providers of seed, fertiliser, sprays and agronomy advice have a big influence on both paddock and crop selection. Consider the soil type, stock class, and animal welfare requirements when advising your clients. The right crop, for the right stock, on the right soil.

| Spring | Summer |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-sale season briefing for all staff regarding expectation for cultivation and selection of appropriate paddocks and crops.• Work with the farmer to develop paddock plans considering soil slope, buffer zones, and shelter, and if the soil type is suitable for the class of livestock. Highlight any risks and discuss mitigations to ensure good animal welfare outcomes in winter. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When assessing whether crop spray or fertiliser is needed, think about whether there are any risk factors which could be a problem during grazing – look at slope, buffer zones, and shelter. If you have concerns, raise these with the farmer.• Encourage written grazing contracts with clear responsibilities and expectations for animal welfare where required. |
| Autumn | Winter |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalise clients' winter grazing plans – double-check feed budgets, exclusion areas, grazing direction, and adverse weather plans.• Discuss whether a catch-crop or winter forage crop will be established behind winter crops, where practical and appropriate.• Consider facilitating a pre-grazing training session for your clients' farm staff – ensure everyone knows the plan, and what to do if things aren't going quite right. Consider inviting the client's vet and farm consultant to broaden the depth of discussion topics during the training session, including contingency planning for animal health challenges or adverse weather events.• Book in with your client to assess the yield of their crops; offer to feed test all crops, including a nitrate test just before stock go onto crops and test supplementary feeds on hand. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check-in regularly with your clients – is the grazing plan working? Have adverse weather interventions been used? Any animal health issues?• If an animal health issue is occurring or has occurred where the crop may have been a contributing factor, encourage your client to immediately contact their veterinarian.• Late winter – Consider facilitating a post-winter debrief for your clients' staff – what went well? What could be done differently next winter to make things go even better?• Meet with your clients to plan crop sowing for next season – ask them to pre-prepare by holding a team debrief session and create a list of any lessons learned from last winter. |



Finance (banks/accountants)

Financial advisers do not have a direct impact on animal welfare but can influence farm systems and decisions through debt structuring, lending decisions and financial advice.

Any time of year

- When providing the end-of-year financial accounts, identify the costs associated with winter grazing so farmers can make informed decisions when considering change.
- When assessing lending applications for winter grazing/run-off properties, ensure farmers understand the implications of wintering on the soil type and topography. The **Sustainable Agriculture Finance Initiative** criteria or similar, should be used to assess the sustainability of the business proposal.



The Winter Grazing Action Group is a pan-sector group focused on improving animal welfare outcomes on winter grazing systems for deer, sheep and cattle. Organisations represented on the group are Beef+LambNZ, Dairy Companies Association of NZ, DairyNZ, Deer Industry NZ, Federated Farmers, NZ Veterinary Association, PGG Wrightson, as well as independent farmers and rural professionals. The group disbanded in October 2021.

The Ministry for Primary Industries is a member of the Winter Grazing Action Group and provides the secretariat support for the Group. For more information see www.mpi.govt.nz/wintering or email animalwelfare@mpi.govt.nz

While every effort has been made to ensure that this information is accurate, the Ministry for Primary Industries does not accept any responsibility or liability for error of fact, omission, interpretation or opinion that may be present, nor for the consequences of any decision based on this information.