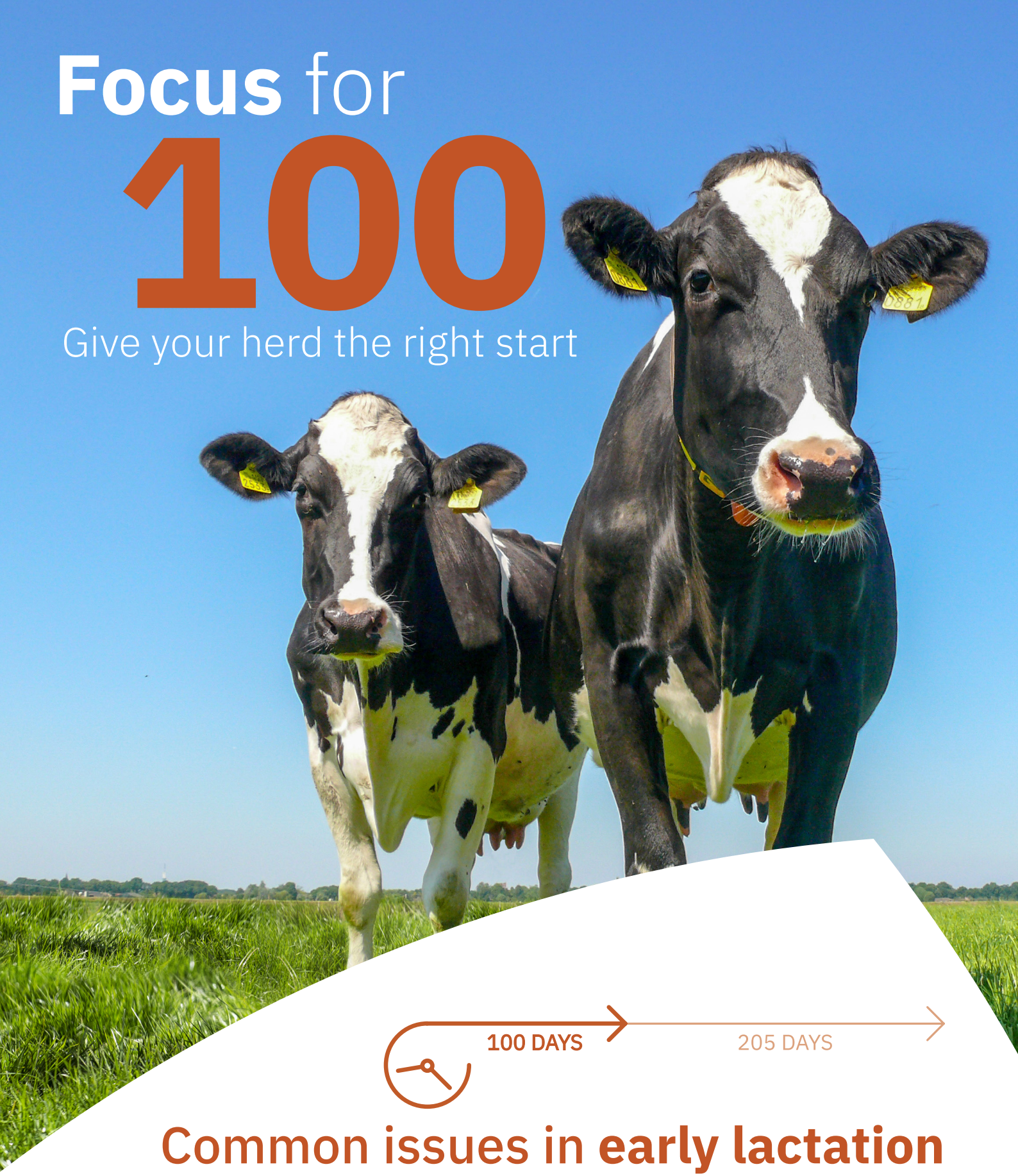
Focus for 100

Give your herd the right start



100 DAYS

205 DAYS

Common issues in **early lactation**

The early-lactation cow is susceptible to a host of metabolic issues and diseases as her system comes under pressure while producing milk and recovering from calving. Low milk protein, low butterfat, subacute rumen acidosis (SARA) and fertility issues are all linked and can inhibit performance.

Alltech®

Low milk protein

When the cow's energy demand for maintenance plus milk yield outstrips the energy supplied, milk protein percentage drops. Pitch your fresh cow diet at your peak milk yield rather than the current yield.

1. Focus on the energy (starch and sugar) of the overall diet as the main driver of milk protein. Good levels of cereals should be a focus in concentrates, with maize meal, barley or wheat in the top ingredients. A concentrate with a UFL of 0.95 should be provided (fresh weight).
2. Balance intakes and grazing targets. Don't restrict cows' intake by forcing them to graze paddocks too tightly, as this will restrict their energy intake. Intakes will also be reduced on wetter days, and additional silage and/or concentrate is critical. As a guide, concentrate level should be 0.33 kg per kg of milk when cows are inside full time.
3. A cow's largest stomach compartment, the rumen, goes through turmoil in early lactation. Consider utilising a live yeast (Yea-Sacc®), which has been shown to help stabilise variation in the rumen. Research carried out at University College Dublin on Yea-Sacc has shown benefits in minimising loss of body condition and promoting fertility due to more energy coming from the rumen.
4. Check your milk fat to protein ratio. A ratio greater than 1.4 indicates negative energy balance, ketosis and BCS loss. A ratio below 1.1 indicates SARA, seen in April, May and June. Aim for a target of 1.2 to 1.3.

Low butterfat

Low butterfat can be associated with several issues, including rumen health problems and a lack of fibre, energy and/or highly digestible grass. Sometimes it is not one issue, but a combination of some or all.

1. Grass covers need to be between 1,300 and 1,500 kg DM/ha. Second-rotation grass is high in oil and low in fibre, which can hinder butterfat production. Supplementation strategies can help manage this.
2. Additional fibre sources may be helpful if manure consistency is loose. Straw, hay, soya hulls and beet pulp are all high-fibre options. Ask for advice on this from your feed advisor or nutritionist.
3. The inclusion of Yea-Sacc helps stabilise the rumen by managing rumen pH and neutralising acidity. This has been shown to promote butterfat production.

Focus for 100 starts here – scan the QR code for more information

Subacute rumen acidosis (SARA)

Subacute ruminal acidosis is associated with the transition in diets or changes in weather that we typically see in spring calving systems. It occurs when the pH in the rumen goes below 5.5. Loose dungs, or bubbles in the dung, tend to indicate SARA.

1. Including a fibre source through a forage (hay, straw or silage) or through concentrate (beet pulp or soya hulls) can help slow down the passge of ingredients, improve utilisation and reduce high acid low.
2. When silage is not being used up and begins to go off, mycotoxins can begin to develop, killing beneficial bacteria within the rumen and preventing it from working effectively. High-quality bales might be a good option here, or a mycotoxin binder such as Mycosorb A+ can help.
3. Yea-Sacc promotes bacteria for fibre digestion and minimises the acid load by increasing rumen pH, supporting more efficient digestion of feed and helping to address the risk of acidosis.
4. Be sure to check your herd's milk fat to protein ratio. Anything below 1.1 indicates SARA.

Fertility issues

Research has shown that with excessive BCS loss, ovulation and conception rates decline.

1. Monitor BCS. Target at breeding should be 2.75–3.0, with the objective to lose <0.5 units.
2. Close the energy gap. Target the cows' diet at peak yield rather than current yield. Grass utilisation should be a priority, but do not restrict intakes. Additional forage and concentrates may be required.

i. Six UFL are required for maintenance and 0.45 UFL per litre of milk. Excellent-quality grass will provide 1 UFL and concentrate more than 0.95 UFL.

3. Look after the rumen. While it may be difficult, keep diet/intake consistent with any changes made slowly. The use of a live yeast (Yea-Sacc) has been shown to optimise variation in the rumen.
4. Minerals are key to ensuring that cows begin to cycle again and show strong heats. Minerals should be set pro rata according to your feed rate. Copper, zinc, manganese and selenium play important roles in ovulation and cycling. Feeding these minerals in their organic forms, such as those found in Bioplex® Copper, Bioplex® Zinc, Bioplex® Manganese, and Sel-Plex®, helps them be absorbed efficiently and stored and utilised better by the animal. Discuss this with your feed representative to ensure cows are getting the correct rate.