Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

BEEF

November 2014

Edited by
Pearse Kelly,
Head of Drystock

Dry cow feeding

At this year's Teagasc National Beef Conference, David Kenny from Grange clearly showed that when it comes to getting spring calving suckler cows back in calf, the body condition they are in when they calve has by far the biggest influence. Feeding extra to thin cows after they calve has very little effect on shortening the length of time it takes to get them cycling again. Because of this, it is vital that cows are fed correctly during the dry period over the winter to ensure they calve down in the correct condition next spring.

Cows need to be grouped for feeding according to their body condition. Ideally, you should have three different groups:

1. Cows that are in good condition that can lose some of it between now and calving;
2. Cows that should maintain their body condition; and,
3. Cows that need to gain condition between now and calving.

How much each group is fed will depend on the quality of the forage you are feeding. Where silage is of good quality, you may be able to restrict the amount fed to varying

How to body score your cows.

In this issue...

teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

degrees for the first two groups of cows, which will help to save on your winter feed costs. The thin group of cows should not, however, be restricted, as they need to gain condition. If silage quality is poor, they may need to be supplemented with 1-2kg of ration.
Remember also that in-calf suckler cows on a forage diet need to be supplemented with an adequate mineral and vitamin supplement over the winter. Be careful of supplements that may be priced at the low end as they may not supply enough of the essential minerals and vitamins that cows need. When you are feeding 100g per day of a supplement to a cow, that costs €200 per tonne more, but supplies everything she needs, it will only cost an extra €3 per cow over a five-month winter compared to a cheaper, less effective supplement. Your adviser can give you guidelines on what should be in an effective supplement for dry suckler cows.

Autumn calvers

The priority over the coming months with autumn-calved suckler cows is to get them back in calf again. Where cows are not fed enough energy in their daily diet, they start to milk off their back and this negative energy balance can delay their return to cycling and ultimately leads to a delayed rebreeding. The table shows the amount of meal feeding needed with silages of varying quality both before they are bred and after they go in calf.

Meal feeding levels (kg) to autumn calvers

Silage DMD %	72	66	60
Cows in good condition			
Pre-mating	1.8	2.5	3.0
Post-mating	0	1.5	2.0
Cows in poor condition			
Pre-mating	1.8	2.5	3.0
Post-mating	1.8	2.5	3.0

Test your silage

Every year literally millions of tons of silage are made in this country. How many farmers, however, know the estimated quality and protein of the silage they have made? Not enough is the answer. A typical silage pit can have over €10,000 worth of feed in it. Surely it is worth spending €25 on a silage test to check its feeding value – even if it is only to see if you need to do something different next year. Over- or underestimating the feeding value of silage because of a lack of test results is costing Irish farmers money. For example, 50 weanlings or stores underperforming by only 0.1kg per day (due to inadequate meal feeding rates) will leave a beef farmer with 750kg less liveweight coming out of the shed after a five-month winter. How much is this worth?

A typical silage pit can have over €10,000 worth of feed in it. Surely it is worth spending €25 on a silage test to check its feeding value?

Liver fluke – getting it right

Every farmer knows what liver fluke is. The market has been full for years with different products to control it. Most farmers do treat their stock over the winter to combat it. And yet every year we hear of livers being condemned in factories due to severe fluke infestation even on farms where a 'control' programme was in place. Why?

The answer in most cases is simple. On many farms the wrong products are being used at the wrong time to treat cattle. All too often a fluke product is being given too early after cattle are housed and only a percentage of the fluke are being killed, and the necessary follow-up treatment a number of weeks later is not being given.

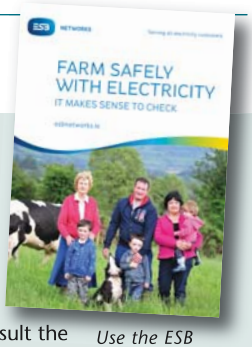
When choosing a liver fluke control product you need to ask: (1) what age fluke will this kill?; and, (2) based on the answer to this, how many weeks after I house my stock should I use this product? With some fluke products you would actually need to wait almost three months after housing if you wanted to get away with just one treatment (because they only kill adult fluke). With others you need to wait at least six weeks. The alternative is to treat 10 days after housing and then follow it up (if necessary) with a second treatment the required number of weeks later. Combination worm and fluke treatment products are popular now on many farms. Speak to your vet before using one of these, or any fluke product, to work out the correct strategy for using them. Otherwise you may be only half doing the job.

Choose your liver fluke product carefully.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Check your safety switches and farmyard lighting

As winter sets in and the clock changes, electrical safety switches and farmyard lighting need your attention – you need to check them. The electrical safety switch or 32mA residual current device (RCD) is a highly effective safety device for portable appliances. However, an Irish study indicates that over 15% do not trip when tested or are bypassed, which could lead to electrocution. Consult the ESB Networks booklet 'Farm Safely with Electricity'. Also, it's now the right time to check light bulbs or have light covers cleaned to give adequate farmyard lighting and prevent trips and falls.



Use the ESB Networks booklet.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Feeding weanlings for better growth

Effects of supplementary concentrate type and protein level on growth of suckler-bred weanling bulls offered grass silage are being studied by M. McGee, C. Lenehan, K. McMenamin, E. O'Riordan and A. Moloney at Teagasc, Grange.

The cost of winter feed for weanling cattle can be diluted somewhat by exploiting compensatory ('catch-up') growth potential, i.e., growth of cattle is restricted during the winter (store) period, which results in compensatory growth subsequently when grazing cheaper grass. Research at Grange has shown that optimum winter growth rates for weanling bulls and steers alike is 0.5-0.7kg/day. This can be achieved by feeding good quality grass silage (e.g., DMD 70%) to appetite and supplementing it with 1-2kg concentrates daily.

Energy, and to a lesser extent protein, are the most important nutrients required by growing cattle. Supplementary protein is particularly expensive. In addition to cereals, a wide variety of feed ingredients are available and used extensively in beef rations in Ireland: soya hulls is one such ingredient. Winter feed costs could be reduced through utilisation of more cost-effective feed ingredients. The objective of this 84-day winter feeding study was to examine the effects of: (i) replacing barley with soya hulls; and, (ii) protein level in a barley-based concentrate, on intake and growth of weanling bulls offered grass silage.

A total of 120 autumn-born and 135 spring-born Limousin or Charolais sired suckler-bred bull weanlings (mean initial weight 411kg) were used. They were housed in pens in slatted floor sheds and offered high quality grass silage to appetite and 1.7kg dry matter (DM) of one of three concentrates daily:

1. **Barley/soyabean-based** (86.2% barley, 6% soyabean meal, 5% molasses, 2.8% minerals and vitamins);
2. **Soya hulls-based** (93.3% soya hulls; 5% molasses; 1.7% minerals and vitamins), and,
3. **Barley-based** (92.2% barley, 5% molasses, 2.8% minerals and vitamins).

The barley/soyabean- and soya hulls-based concentrates were formulated to have similar protein (PDIE) levels on a DM basis. Silage DM intake per day was 5.4kg, 5.3kg and 5.4kg for barley/soyabean-, barley- and soya hulls-based treatments, respectively. There was no significant difference in daily liveweight gain (kg) between the barley/soyabean-based (0.859) and soya hull-based (0.871) rations, whereas daily liveweight gain was significantly lower (57g) for the barley-based (0.802) compared to the barley/soyabean-based ration. Although feed nutrition databases indicate that the feed energy value of soya hulls is lower than barley (and soyabean meal), under the conditions of this study, this was not the case. The growth response to additional protein to barley was relatively small.