

Beef

A Teagasc Advisory Newsletter



March 2014

Wet weather hangover?



Some damage to sheds and land caused by Storm Darwin.

The aim for February and March is to get all the fields (including silage ground) grazed off so that the farm is set up to start the second grazing rotation from early to mid-April.

A tough ask this year! As I write this, in the week after Storm Darwin, I have my fingers crossed that the worst is over and, by the time you read this, you will have managed to get some cattle out.

Getting going again this spring

Get fertiliser out

As soon as conditions are right (when soil is not waterlogged and heavy rain is not forecast), spreading fertiliser is the number one priority. This is because it takes time for fertiliser to work, so it needs to be spread now in order to have grass for the start of April.

While there are risks of loss of nitrogen (N) during the spring, there is still a good economic response to spreading N at this time. Research by Teagasc has shown that spreading 48 units of N/acre in the spring produced extra grass at a cost of €90/t DM. This is far cheaper than silage, which costs about €140/t DM, and

Continued overleaf

meal, which costs around €320/t DM. Research has shown that the best way to spread the 48 units is in two separate applications. This means spreading a half bag of urea in January/February, and another half bag in March. If you have a very low demand for grass in spring, a half bag in March is adequate.

Put a grazing plan in place

If you managed to get cattle out in the last week of February, there are roughly 40 days until the start of the second rotation, so on a 100-acre farm, an average 2.5 acres needs to be grazed per day. If cattle were turned out for the first week of March, then roughly three acres need to be grazed each day. If you are not hitting these targets, you need to turn out more cattle. If you are grazing more ground than this, you need to slow down by either feeding meal/silage outside, or by bringing some stock back in. The target should be to graze off at least 50% of the grazing ground before grazing silage ground. This will allow grazing ground to recover in time for the second rotation. It will not affect silage yield or quality if harvest date is delayed by 10 days. Research at Grange compared the yield and quality of silage where it was grazed in the spring and where it was not grazed. By delaying the harvest date by 10 days silage ground grazed on March 16 had the same yield and quality as silage that was not grazed in the spring.

Be flexible

The key to managing grazing with poor ground conditions, is to be flexible. Be prepared to think outside the norm and bring cattle in again, if needs be. Anything that gives you

more options will help, such as multiple gaps in fields, strip wire, roadways, etc.

Have you thought about on/off grazing? Many beef farmers will say this is impossible or “it’s alright for dairy farmers”, but why not bring cattle off grass if it a downpour starts while they are out? A few hours grazing are far better than none, and you will limit damage to the ground by taking them off while it is wet overhead. Some suckler farmers turn suckler cows out after the school run in the morning and bring them in again before doing the school run in the afternoon. There is no problem getting cows back, as they want to return to the calves.

Be careful with slurry

Housing has come under real pressure with some of the wettest weather on record for January and February. It is a reality that a home will have to be found for the extra slurry produced while cattle were kept indoors. However, try to avoid spreading slurry on heavy covers of grass, unless it is very watery. There is a risk that thick slurry will stick to the leaves and will reduce palatability for grazing. Instead, consider applying slurry to the ground immediately after it has been grazed (in the first two weeks of March), so that there is time for it to have soaked in before the second rotation.

Watch fodder supplies

Make sure you have enough fodder to fall back on if animals can’t get out grazing, or in case weather means animals have to be rehoused. Ideally, you would like to have a month’s feeding in reserve. If this is not the case, consider your options now by either purchasing extra silage now, or by stretching out existing supplies by restricting silage and feeding extra

meal. (Two kgs on top of allowances given below will save 30-40% on silage demand). Access to the silage must be restricted for this to work. Feeding space is important if access to silage is being restricted. Check the value of feeds with your local Teagasc adviser, before purchase. This is particularly important for forages and wet feeds.

First calvers

These animals are your number one priority. They are still growing and will need to get back in calf. All first calvers should get 1-2kg meal pre-turnout, regardless of silage quality.

Calved suckler cows

Turn calved cows out as soon as possible. If you can't turn them out, they need to get 2kg meal

along with ad lib silage. The only scenario where you can get away without feeding meals to these cows is where you have good quality silage, cows are in good order and are getting out to grass within a month of calving.

Cows that haven't calved yet

Avoid making big changes to their feeding in the three weeks pre-calving. This year, most silage is good enough to maintain a dry cow. If silage is very poor, she will need 2kg meal/day. Don't forget to feed a good pre-calver mineral.

Weanlings/stores

You should take meal out of weanling/store diets pre-turnout to maximise compensatory growth (unless silage quality is very poor or silage is running out).



HEALTH & SAFETY

Protect your back

Farmers have a disproportionately high level of lower back, hip, and knee problems. This is mainly due to the physical strain put on these joints. It is estimated that one in five farmers will need a hip replacement in their lifetime. Becoming aware of the farming tasks putting strain on joints and avoiding them could prevent future joint problems. This is particularly the case in spring. One simple tip is not to jump down from tractors or vehicles - getting down backwards and having three points of contact with the vehicle is safer and less stressful on joints.



Safely dismount from tractors.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Conserving high moisture beans

An update from Pdraig O’Kiely, Teagasc Grange, on the effects of crimping and applying an additive to bean grains.

Field beans (a.k.a. faba, tick, or horse beans) are legume grains, included in cattle rations mainly for their high protein content, but whose available energy content is at least as good as cereal grains.

An experiment was undertaken to assess the effects of crimping and applying an additive to bean grains, harvested at a high-moisture content and then ensiled on their subsequent conservation characteristics.

High moisture field bean grains were successfully conserved by ensilage, undergoing a limited fermentation and in-silo loss, and being relatively stable during feed



Field beans are included in rations for their high protein content.

out. Each additive had its unique influence on conservation characteristics and nutritive value, with no single additive being successful in its influence on all traits (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Conservation characteristics of ensiled high-moisture, crimped bean grains.

Additive	None	Acid	Urea	Bacteria ¹	Bacteria ²
Dry matter (g/kg)	729	721	694	687	722
DM digestibility (g/kg)	813	805	809	794	805
Starch (g/kg DM)	340	323	319	343	340
Crude protein (g/kg DM)	289	286	328	295	288
Sugars (g/kg DM)	75	94	81	60	69
pH	5.9	5.9	8.9	4.9	5.2
Fermentation products (g/kg DM)	17	12	12	39	23
NH3-N (g/kg N)	3	3	24	11	5
In-silo losses (g DM/kg DM)	38	44	101	98	56
Aerobic stability (days)	4	3	7	10	3

¹Heterofermentative; ²Homofermentative

For further information on any issues raised in this newsletter, or to access other enterprise newsletters, please contact your local Teagasc adviser or see www.teagasc.ie.