

# BEEF

October 2015

## Autumn grazing plan



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It is important to put in place a simple grazing plan for the remainder of the year so that cattle can remain outdoors at grass for as long as possible, while at the same time ensuring that there is a bank of grass built up for turning stock out early in the spring. Aim to close a proportion of the farm each week starting in the first half of October. The

percentage you close each week will depend on whether you are on a dry farm or on a heavy, slow grass-growing farm. Farms that have poor winter growth will need to close earlier to give the grass a longer amount of time to grow. A simple rule to follow is that dry farms should close their first fields around October 10 and have 60% of the farm closed by the first

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### In this issue

- Make your autumn grazing plan now
- Housing is an ideal time to treat for parasites
- New beef production guidelines launched
- National Beef Conference: Athlone, October 13

week in November. The remaining 40% is then grazed in November. Heavy or slow grass growing farms should start closing a week earlier and have 60% of their farm grazed by the last week in October. By following this plan the amount of stock left at grass will be determined by the amount of grass there is left to be grazed on those fields not yet closed. If you find you are going to graze out fields too quickly (and are likely to exceed the 60% closed by your target date), then some stock

need to be housed. If you find that you are not likely to hit the target proportions grazed by the dates set, then you may have to graze some lighter covers of grass first – otherwise too many fields will be grazed too late and spring grass covers will be reduced. House priority stock first, e.g., cattle close to finish. Lighter stock, e.g., weanlings/calves, should be the last stock that you house, as these will do the least amount of damage if there is a lot of wet weather.

## Routine housing treatments

Housing is one of the best times of the year for treating cattle against some of the more common internal and external parasites. Most beef farmers treat their cattle around housing, but there are so many products now on the market that it can be confusing as to which product to use and how best to use it. Some farmers also have products left over from earlier in the year and these also need to be considered. Products vary in price, in what they control and in how they are given to the animal. Whichever product you are going to use, you need to ask yourself:

- will type II stomach worms be controlled?;
- will lice be covered?;
- do I need to cover for liver fluke?;
- how convenient is it to give the product?;
- how long after housing do I need to wait before giving the treatment?;
- will I need to give a second treatment and when?;
- could rumen fluke be an issue?;
- how long is the withdrawal period with any of the products used?; and,
- what will the overall cost per animal be?

All of the avermectin (any product that has an active ingredient ending with 'mectin'), and all of

the benzimidazole (mostly white drench products) will control type II stomach worms and lungworms. The levamisole products (mostly the clear or yellow drenches) will not kill type II stomach worms and should not be used. Some of the combination worm/fluke drenches are levamisole based and so should not be used for a housing dose. The avermectin products will also control sucking lice. If you are using a benzimidazole wormer you will also need to give a lice treatment. Depending on the amount of lice present, many of the lice only treatments recommend a second treatment a number of weeks later.

On farms that have to treat for fluke, the key thing to watch is the product used. Some products only control adult fluke, whereas others will also control immature fluke. Only a small number control early immatures. Know which type you are using; otherwise, you may only be killing a proportion of the fluke present. Many farmers will treat for fluke a couple of weeks after housing (along with their stomach worm and house treatment) and again later in the winter to pick up those not covered. Otherwise, you have to wait too long to give the fluke treatment to make sure that they are all killed with just one treatment.



## RESEARCH UPDATE

## Alternative finishing strategies for Holstein-Friesian bulls slaughtered at 19 months

By AGRIC researchers Robert Prendiville, Teagasc Grange, and Brian Murphy and Brendan Swan of Teagasc Johnstown Castle.

Finishing spring-born male dairy calves as bulls, at 18-20 months of age, offers the potential to increase the stock-carrying capacity on farms, whereby animals are slaughtered before the second winter. This has been practised by a number of beef producers where bulls were typically housed and finished over a 100-day period on an *ad-lib* concentrate diet to ensure an acceptable carcass weight and fat score at slaughter. The prospect of finishing bulls off pasture and reducing the dependence on concentrates during the finishing phase may improve farm profitability by reducing the costs associated with production.

A study was undertaken at Johnstown Castle to determine growth and carcass characteristics of Holstein-Friesian bulls produced on three contrasting finishing strategies. All animals had a common first winter indoors (store period), after which they were allocated to either: 1. 100 days' grazed pasture, followed by 100 days at pasture

supplemented with 5.75kg concentrate daily; 2. 50 days' grazed pasture, followed by 150 days at pasture supplemented with 5.75kg concentrate daily; and, 3. 100 days' grazed pasture followed by 100 days indoors on *ad-lib* concentrate.

During the grazing season bulls were rotationally grazed in a paddock system. **Table 1** shows the total meals fed, average daily gain (ADG) during the meal feeding period, carcass weight, conformation and fat score for each treatment.

Overall, bulls finished off pasture were lighter and had a lower fat score than bulls finished indoors.

The extra carcass weight achieved from feeding the bulls indoors would not cover the cost of the extra meals fed at current meal and beef prices.

Results from this study would also question supplementing bulls with concentrates for more than 100 days at pasture. Farmers considering finishing Holstein-Friesian bulls over 16 months of age should talk to a meat processor first as markets for this type of animal can be limited.

**Table 1: Results of Johnstown Castle study of finishing strategies for Holstein-Friesian bulls.**

Phase 1	100 days' grass	50 days' grass	100 days' grass
Phase 2	100 days' grass + 5.75kg meal	150 days' grass + 5.75kg meal	100 days' <i>ad-lib</i> meal (indoors)
Meals fed (Phase 2)	575kg	865kg	1,265kg
ADG (Phase 2)	1.38	1.36	2.12
Carcass wt.	296kg	300kg	325kg
Conformation score	O=	O=	O+
Fat score	2=/2+	2=/2+	3-

## Beef production system guidelines

As part of the Beef Roundtable discussions, chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and Bord Bia were requested to produce a set of beef system guidelines in consultation with the industry, which would advise farmers on the best management practices to follow when operating any particular beef system, and to explain the different market requirements that need to be considered. These guidelines were launched at this year's National Ploughing Championships, and include 14 of the most common steer, heifer and bull beef production systems that are currently on Irish farms. They cover both weanlings bred from the suckler herd and dairy calf to beef systems.

These guidelines were produced for farmers and include best practice for each system around the management to achieve target daily gains, an estimate of the inputs required and the outputs achievable, an awareness of the different market requirements that the beef will be sold into and the risks, if any, associated with each system.



*At the launch of the Beef Production System Guidelines at the Ploughing Championships were (from left): Aidan Murray, Teagasc; Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD; Teagasc Director Prof. Gerry Boyle; and, Joe Burke, Bord Bia.*

They also include a section on economics, allowing farmers to complete their own mini budget for any one system. A small number of copies of the guidelines are available in local Teagasc offices but they can also be viewed and downloaded on our website at [www.teagasc.ie/beef](http://www.teagasc.ie/beef).

## Teagasc National Beef Conference

Every year Teagasc holds a small number of major events that should be of interest to all beef farmers. Our National Beef Conference is one of these events, and this year it returns to the Hodson Bay Hotel in Athlone on October 13, following the very successful beef conference

held there in 2014. Details of what will be covered at this year's conference are included with your newsletter. Attending the conference gives you the opportunity to meet and talk with leading beef advisers, specialists, researchers and farmers. We hope to see you there.