Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

BEEF

April 2016

Closing off silage fields

It has been a very wet and mild winter and a lot of silage fields have medium and, in some cases, heavy covers of grass. In March, with ground conditions and growth being so poor, many farmers have only let stock out to silage ground since St Patrick's Day. Farmers are finding that they won't have adequate time to get all the silage fields grazed off before their planned closing date of the end of March or the first week of April. Our advice is to graze off as many off these silage fields as possible with larger numbers where ground conditions allow. We do not want this dead butt in silage because we know that it can reduce the dry matter digestibility by up to six units. If you don't have adequate time or stock numbers to get all the silage fields grazed off, do not lose heart. The silage off these un-grazed fields would be adequate to feed to dry spring calving suckler cows next winter. You could take these fields out as bales where possible and feed them to the suckler cows at housing in winter.

If you have planned to take two cuts of silage, do not put back your first cut date because of un-grazed silage fields. If you push back the first cut, this will have a knock-on effect on quality and you may not be taking your second cut until mid-August. This in-turn will mean you will not have any after grass for your weanlings until mid-September and building up a bank of grass for the autumn will be difficult. As stated earlier, your first cut can be fed to suckler cows and your second cut of higher DMD silage can be fed to weanlings/finishers/stores.

Edited by
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Butchery workshop

Teagasc is running a Butchery and Small Meat Workshop on April 13 and 14. This will take place in the Teagasc Food Centre, Ashtown, Dublin 15. The workshop will be useful for individuals who are already selling or considering processing meat from their own herd.
To book, go to: www.teagasc.ie/food/research/training/Bookingform.aspx

Teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Fertilising the silage crop

Table 1. First cut grass silage nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) requirements (5t/ha DM) and suggested fertiliser programmes

Soil Index	N kg/ha (units/ac)	P kg/ha (units/ac)	K kg/ha (units/ac)	Fertiliser options[3, 4] No Slurry[1]	Cattle Slurry 3,000gal/ac
1	125 (100)	40 (32)	175 (140)	3.5 bags/ac 0-7-30 4 bags/ac CAN	3.5 bags/ac 24-2.5-10
2	125 (100)	30 (24)	155 (120)	3 bags/ac 0-7-30 4 bags/ac CAN	3 bags/ac 27-2.5-5.0
3	125 (100)	20 (16)	125 (100)	5 bags/ac 15-3-20 1 bags/ac CAN	3 bags/ac CAN
4[2]	125 (100)	0	0	4 bags/ac CAN	3 bags/ac CAN

[1] Index 1 and 2 soils apply P and K balance advice to build soil P and K levels to after grass for example as 24-2.5-10/0-7-30.

[2] Index 4 soils omit P for 2/3 years and retest, Index 4 K omit for 1 year and revert to index 3 advice thereafter until next soil test.

[3] Urea can replace CAN as main N source. Light rain (up to 10 mm) before or after application will reduce N losses from urea.

[4] For older swards with lower yield potential reduce N, P, K by 2 kg N, 4kg P and 25kg K per tonne of grass dry matter (DM).

If your soil is at index 1 or 2 for P and K, you will need to use a compound fertiliser with P and K to get the best results.

Conditions were favourable in late March for spreading slurry.

Growth rates have been poor all over the country but conditions have been favourable to spread fertiliser and slurry over the last two weeks of March. If you have to spread slurry on grazing ground, follow this a week later with bag of urea to kick off grass growth when soil temperatures rise. If your soil is at index 1 or 2 for P and K, you will need to use a compound fertiliser with P and K to get the best results. Even farms stocked below 170kg N/ha should target 50/60 units of nitrogen spread on grazing ground before the end of April.

How much is high DMD silage worth on your farm?

Table 2. Impact of quality of silage on weight gain				
Beef cattle – Teagasc Grange				
Digestibility (DMD%)	75	70	65	60
Intake (kg/day)	9	8.3	7.6	7
Live weight gain (kg/day)	0.83	0.66	0.49	0.31
Carcass gain (kg/day)	0.51	0.39	0.27	0.15

The results of silage trials on beef cattle are shown in **Table 2**. It clearly shows the advantages of high quality silage in terms of live weight gain, carcass gain and intakes. If we look at live weight gain we see a difference of 0.52kg/day between animals fed 75% DMD silage versus those eating 65% DMD silage. This 0.52kg/day over a 120-day winter equates to 62kg live weight. A farmer with 50 cattle is losing 3,100kg live weight and at €2/kg live weight, it gives a total loss of €6,200.

Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme

The Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme is holding a farm walk on the farm of John Lalor, Ballyfin, Co. Laois on Tuesday April 12 at 11.00am. The farm walk will focus on systems of production, setting up the farm for maximum production, reseeding and financial performance. There will be speakers from Grassland Agro and Teagasc, and anyone with an interest in the calf to beef system is welcome to attend. Meet at the church in Ballyfin.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Plan work and provide a safe place for children

So far in 2016, three farmers have lost their lives in farm accidents. Let's put safety to the fore as the busy summer season approaches. The period from April 11 to 22 has been designated as Farm Safety Fortnight to focus farmers' attention on accident prevention. Areas that deserve particular attention include work organisation and childhood safety. Most accidents are associated with 'hurry', so plan work and work at steady pace. Children need special safety care on farms – a code of practice is available at www.hsa.ie

RESEARCH UPDATE

Finishing strategies

Robert Prendiville, Brian Murphy and Brendan Swan of Teagasc Grange and Johnstown Castle report on alternative finishing strategies for Holstein-Friesian dairy steers.

Previously, the majority of male dairy steer cattle were finished during the second winter in a 24-month production system. The target carcass weight was 320kg. Finishing steers at a younger age off pasture before the second winter ensures that the housing is available for weanling stock only and reduces the amount of silage required. Recently a study was carried out at Johnstown Castle to investigate three alternative finishing strategies for dairy steers. Forty five steers were assigned to one of three strategies:

1 slaughtered at 21 months of age and finished at pasture plus 5kg of concentrate dry matter (DM) per head daily for 110 days pre-slaughter (21LONG);
2 slaughtered at 21 months of age and finished at pasture plus 5kg of concentrate DM per head daily for 60 days pre-slaughter (21SHORT); or,
3 slaughtered at 24 months of age and finished indoors on grass silage plus 5kg DM of concentrate per head daily (24INDOOR).

All groups were managed similarly during the first winter and were turned out to grass again on March 19, 2015. Concentrates were introduced to 21LONG in late July and early September for 21SHORT. Animals in 24INDOOR were on a pasture-only diet throughout the second grazing season. Steers were adapted to their finishing diet over a 10-day period. Both 21LONG and 21SHORT were slaughtered on November 3, 2015 and 24INDOOR was slaughtered on February 9, 2016. Live weight at slaughter was approximately 76kg greater for 24INDOOR than the other groups (**Table 3**). These results indicate that finishing steers off pasture over a 60-day period at the end of the second season is comparable in performance to prolonged finishing at pasture. Compared to the standard 24-month production system, the 21SHORT required 35% less concentrates resulting in a decrease in carcass weight of 33kg suggesting that the 21SHORT system is a viable alternative to traditional indoor winter finishing.

Table 3: Animal performance in the three production systems.

	21LONG	21SHORT	24INDOOR
Live weight at slaughter (kg)	537	535	612
Carcass weight (kg)	276	275	308
Conformation score	P+	P+	O-
Fat score	2=	2=	3-/=
Average daily gain during finishing (kg/d)	0.91	0.90	0.99
Concentrate dry matter intake during the finishing period (kg)	542	283	436