



Maximise the performance in calves by grazing the correct sward heights.

BEEF

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Grazing young calves

A common sight in July on many farms that have young dairy-bred beef calves, is these calves up to their knees in pasture that more often than not has headed out. This grass has very little leaf cover and is very low in feeding value. Hence the performance per day of these calves is without doubt very poor. Meals are sometimes fed to compensate for this poor performance, which leads to the calves eating even less grass per day, causing the grass to get even further ahead of them and making matters worse. This downward spiral should either be avoided or stopped if it is starting. Ideally, calves should only be grazing swards that are no more than 8-9cm in height and should be moved regularly before the grass moves ahead of them. Small groups of calves should be avoided as they cannot graze swards down quick

enough, unless they are in very small paddocks. Older born calves should be off meals from June to September unless the weather is unusually wet. A leader follower system works best for calves as they are constantly getting the best pick of the sward, are moving every couple of days and are never being forced to graze down a sward to the butt. If you do not have a follower group then just use the topper instead. Divide up large fields or paddocks with electric fencing suitable for use with calves, so that they do not spend more than three to four days on the same patch of ground. The Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme found huge differences in the performance of calves at grass last summer from one farm to the next, with most of this due to management factors.

Edited by
Pearse Kelly,
Head of Drystock
Knowledge Transfer

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Farm to farm grain trading

Interest in farm to farm grain trading has increased considerably in recent years. The option of storing high moisture grains on farm has made it more attractive to beef farmers who previously would not have considered it. With grain prices off the combine likely to be very competitive in 2016, it is sure to be of interest in many parts of the country for both tillage and beef farmers. For it to be economical for both farmers involved in the trading, transparency in the methodology for agreeing a price is necessary.

All trailer loads should be weighed at an agreed weighbridge or local merchant. After that, it is essential that the dry matter (DM) of the grain is determined, as this has the biggest effect on the price that should be paid per tonne. Agree on the procedure for doing this (number of samples, sample size, laboratory for sending them to, etc.). The value of the high moisture grain should be based on the price that the grain would have achieved if it was subsequently sold to a grain merchant at 20% moisture content (80% DM), which is

referred to as the green grain harvest price. The tillage farmer should also take into account that harvesting costs may be higher as it generally takes longer to harvest high moisture crops. Transport costs may also vary, depending on the distance of the beef farm from where the crop is harvested and this should also be factored in. Teagasc has an excellent fact sheet on farm to farm trading of grains that explains in great detail the best method for valuing these crops. This fact sheet is available from your local adviser.



Farm to farm trading of grains likely to be popular in 2016.

Beef farm walks

The Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme is holding a farm walk on the farm of Conor Greene, Rathowen, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath on Thursday July 14. Walks will begin at 2.00pm and 6.00pm. The farm walk will focus on Conor's system of production, which is primarily a Friesian steer system, slaughtering animals between 24 and 28 months of age. Topics will include financial budgets and performance, herd health, optimising grass utilisation and assessing carcass conformation. There will be speakers

from Teagasc, MSD Animal Health and Kepak, and anyone with an interest in dairy calf to beef systems is welcome to attend.

A Teagasc–*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER Beef Farm Walk will take place on the farm of James Strain in Burnfoot, Co. Donegal on July 12 at 2.00pm sharp. The farm consists of 22ha of mainly heavy land in a winter-calving weanling system. The farm's gross margin was €629/ha in 2015 and the walk will focus on how James improved his grassland management, cow type and cut his production costs.

Health issues to consider this month

Blackleg

Full immunity to blackleg using the clostridial vaccines requires a two-shot programme, with a booster given four weeks after the primary shot. Avoid giving any other vaccine within 14 days of giving the blackleg vaccine. Where incidences of blackleg have occurred on a farm, a blackleg vaccination programme is a must.

Summer mastitis

From June onwards, dry cows are going to be susceptible to summer mastitis right through to September, which corresponds with high fly numbers. This condition is one where prevention is key. Whether you choose to use dry cow tubes, Stockholm tar or fly repellent to help reduce the risk, it is important to take some combination of preventative measures. Cows need to be herded regularly during this high risk period if you are to spot potential problems. If cows are lying go in and get them up and walk through them. Have cows in well topped fields and avoid fields that are wet or have a lot of tree cover, where fly populations are high. Keep an eye on maiden/dry heifers as well over the coming months.

Dosing

Dairy-born calves and yearlings may begin to show signs of lungworm (coughing) as temperatures warm during the summer. Dosing should start once calves show signs of coughing, particularly after being moved. Dosing for lungworm will cover for stomach worms as well.



Watch for coughing, especially in dairy-bred calves.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Prevent falls from heights

Falls from heights account for 10% of all fatal accidents on farms and their frequency can rise during the summer months. You are seven times more likely to die from a fall from height than from a fall at ground level. Falls from roofs (particularly fragile ones), ladders, platforms and loads occur in about equal proportions. Safety,

health and welfare at work legislation emphasises the importance of using secure platforms and having guard rails in place. Ladders should be used for access rather than for work, and should be adequately secured. In addition to these controls, work at heights always needs your undivided attention.



Heat detection and herd health

Mervyn Parr and David Kenny of AGRIC, Teagasc, Grange report on monitoring health and reproductive performance in suckler cows.

As the breeding season progresses it is important to note some key factors which will influence the number of calves born in spring 2017. To achieve a calf per cow per year, the cow must become pregnant again within 85 days after calving. Watch cows closely for heat activity and keep records to ensure the bull is fertile. If using artificial insemination, check cows for signs of heat at least three times per day. A cow or heifer standing to be mounted is the gold standard of heat detection.

Herd health issues, and in particular infectious diseases and trace minerals, have received increased prominence as factors affecting reproductive efficiency. Teagasc Grange is currently leading an Ireland-wide Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) funded on-farm experiment designed to examine the contribution to the fertility of suckler herds, if any, of infectious diseases (bovine virus diarrhoea (BVD), infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), *Neospora caninum* and leptospirosis), and trace

elements (copper, iodine and selenium).

Preliminary findings from almost 6,000 cows in 169 spring-calving herds indicate a seroprevalence (antibodies) of 71%, 78%, 44% and 5% for leptospirosis, BVD, IBR and neosporosis, respectively, in non-vaccinated herds. Additionally, results to date suggest that many cows are deficient in selenium, iodine and copper during the breeding season (**Table 1**). Similar to the situation with disease exposure, however, considerable variation was observed between herds.

Final results from this research project, including an analysis of the relationship, if any, between cow fertility and the aforementioned pathogens and trace elements, will be available later in 2016. The outcomes of this study will aid herd owners and veterinarians in terms of understanding and implementing the three pillars of herd health management (identification, control and monitoring), with particular emphasis on optimising reproductive performance.

Table 1. Average blood (plasma) concentrations of trace elements (copper, iodine and selenium) in Irish beef cows during the breeding seasons of 2014 and 2015.

Trace element	Mean (across herds)	Range	*Lower and upper limit	% of cows below lower limit
Copper (M)	11.91	0.48-38.00	8.78-20.40	15%
Iodine (g/L)	30.37	3->150	51-300	82%
Selenium (M)	0.52	0.01-3.70	0.91-1.52	79%

*Lower and upper limits for blood concentrations of trace minerals in cattle (Source: Rogers 2001 and Villard et al., 2002).