



# BEEF

February 2017

## Grassland and fertiliser

Winter so far has been relatively mild, with soil temperatures above normal. This has allowed decent grass covers to build up on fields that have been closed up since last October. If ground conditions allow and soil temperatures go above 6°C this month, then consider applying some fertiliser if there is a level of grass cover. Bare ground should receive slurry initially to allow covers to develop and then a follow-up with bagged fertiliser. Apply 25-30 units of bagged nitrogen (N) per acre. Urea is more cost-

effective than CAN on ground with adequate phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). Otherwise, use one of the compounds.

Last year, fertiliser prices dropped as the season progressed. Many farmers forward bought fertiliser in December and January at last season's prices.

The feedback from merchants is that N prices look like they may rise. If you are in a position to buy early in the season, there may be savings to be made, so speak to your supplier.

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## Dairy calf to beef

The leaflet enclosed with this month's newsletter on dairy calf to beef is a useful guide for anyone currently operating the system, or contemplating getting into it. With an ever-increasing supply of dairy-

cross calves coming on stream, there may be a temptation to try out a few. Teagasc research has looked at the costs of these systems and the outputs in terms of typical carcass weights. **Table 1** outlines the price

available to purchase the calf once the costs and margins for each system are deducted at varying

beef prices. The beef price you choose should also include any potential bonuses.

**Table 1: How much is available to purchase a dairy to beef calf after costs and margin.**

Beef price €/kg	€3.50	€3.70	€3.90	€4.10	€4.30	€4.50
Friesian steer* (Margin €200/hd)	-30	34	98	162	226	290
Early-maturing steer (margin €200/hd)	35	97	159	221	283	345
Early-maturing heifer (margin €170/hd)	55	105	155	205	255	305

\*Output from Friesian steer system is based on 320kg carcass; early-maturing steer – 310kg; and, heifer system – 250kg carcass.

## BDGP issues

If you haven't opted to defer your genotyping tag selection, you should begin to receive genotyping tags from the middle of this month. This will allow you to have animals tagged before turnout.

One area which has proven problematic for some Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) applicants is that they failed to comply with the regulations of the Programme, with regard to the national bovine virus diarrhoea (BVD) scheme. It is crucially important that:

- all your calves are tagged and tested within 20

days of birth; and,

- all animals with a current positive or inconclusive BVD test result must be removed to the knackery as the results arise and have a date of death recorded on the Animal Identification Movement (AIM) system within seven weeks of the date of the initial test.

This last point on the time scales for persistently infected (PI) animal removal could well be reduced in line with the National BVD Programme changes, so bear this in mind.

## National BVD Programme changes

- Compensation of €185 for beef breed PI animals removed, with a registered date of death on the AIM system within three weeks of the initial test, reducing to €60 if removed in the fourth or fifth week after the initial test.
- Compensation of €150 for dairy and dairy-cross heifer PI animals if removed within three weeks of initial test, reducing to €35 if removed in the fourth or fifth week. Receive €30 for PI bull calves if removed within three weeks of the initial test.
- Veterinary investigations of all herds with

PI calves born in 2017. The investigation will be funded through the Rural Development Plan and carried out by an approved private veterinary practitioner (PVP) within three months of the PI animal/s being identified.

- Confirmatory and dam testing by blood sample only. Costs of the vet visit and blood test will be covered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).
- Restriction of herds retaining PI calves and notification of neighbouring herds. Herds holding

PI calves for more than five weeks after the initial test results will automatically be restricted by the DAFM. The restriction will be automatically removed once

the PI calf/calves has/have been removed. Neighbouring herds will also be notified and asked to increase their own biosecurity measures.

## Spring events for beef farmers

Early turnout and the use of proven grazing technologies will increase liveweight gain and reduce the costs of beef production. Teagasc has organised

a series of farm walks (**Table 2**) demonstrating the practicalities of early spring grassland management. Come along to the event nearest you.

**Table 2: Dates and times of the beef farm walks.**

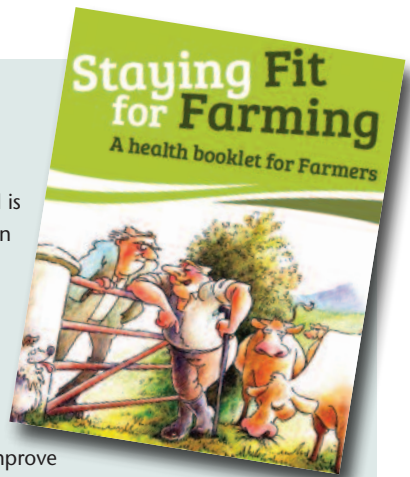
Date	Time	Location
Thursday, February 2	12.00pm	David Walsh, Aughavoulimane, Ballinamult, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
Friday, February 10	12.00pm	Sean Meehan, Bamford, Kells, Co. Kilkenny
Wednesday, February 15	11.00am	Tommy Greene, Ballintlea, Gorey, Co. Wexford
Monday, February 20	12.00pm	Mark Maxwell, Knockycosker, Ballynagore, Co. Westmeath
Tuesday, February 28	12.00pm	Sean Conway, Clondrihara, Ballymoate, Co. Sligo
Tuesday, February 28	12.00pm	Tom Halpin, Roberstown, Carlanstown, Kells, Co. Meath
Friday, March 3	12.00pm	Mike Dillane, Liscullane, Lixnaw, Co. Kerry
Monday, March 6	12.00pm	Kieran Broderick, Knockeen House, Freemount, Charleville, Co. Cork
Tuesday, March 7	12.00pm	Pat Joyce (Junior), Moorefield, Williamstown, Co. Galway
Wednesday, March 8	2.00pm	John Kennedy, Pallasbeg, Newtown, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
Wednesday, March 8	2.00pm	Niall O'Meara, Eyrecourt, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Thursday, March 9	3.00pm	Michael Mellett, Mochara, Shrule, Co. Mayo

### HEALTH & SAFETY

#### Health is wealth

Irish health studies indicate that farmers are losing ground as regards health when compared to other occupational groups. Of particular concern is that farmers die of cardiovascular disease at a five times higher level than blue collar workers. What can be done? A significant level of health improvement is within personal control. Visit your GP for an annual health check-up. Being overweight is a major health issue among Irish farmers. The farmer health booklet 'Staying Fit for Farming' gives

excellent advice and is available on the web. Spring is a good time to set small but significant goals to improve your health.





## RESEARCH UPDATE

## Colostrum management

Bernadette Earley and Mark McGee of Teagasc, AGRIC, Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath report on ensuring suckler calf health.

Health of suckler calves depends on minimising their exposure to disease and maximising their defence against it. As calves are born without a fully functional immune system, because the bovine placenta prevents *in utero* transfer of immunoglobulins (Ig), or antibodies, from the cow to the calf, they depend on the passive immunity provided through absorption of Ig from colostrum (first milk) from the cow until their own immune system is fully developed.

A recent, large-scale DAFM-funded study (RSF 11/S/131) carried out by Teagasc Grange evaluated the passive immune status and health of Irish suckler calves. Results showed that only around 30% of calves had 'high' immunity, 50% had 'medium' immunity and 20% had 'low' or very inadequate levels of immunity. Calves in the low immunity category were significantly more likely to be treated for disease than those in the medium or high categories. These results suggest that more emphasis on colostrum management is needed on Irish suckler beef farms.

Calf passive immunity depends primarily on the colostrum Ig mass (volume x Ig

concentration) consumed, coupled with the Ig absorption capacity of the calf. Factors affecting these parameters impact on the immune status of suckler calves. The ability of the calf to absorb Ig starts to decline quickly after birth. Consequently, early consumption of sufficient high-quality colostrum is the first and most important line of defence against disease. Ideally, calves should suckle the cow to satiation as soon as possible after birth. In situations where this is not feasible, research at Teagasc Grange has shown that feeding the calf 5% of its birth weight, e.g., ~2 litres of colostrum for a 40kg calf, within one hour or so of birth, with subsequent suckling of the dam (or a second feed) six to eight hours later, ensures adequate transfer of immunity. First-milking colostrum should be given priority as the Ig concentration of second-milking colostrum is only half that of the first. Colostrum yield is usually higher in cow breed types with higher milk production potential, in mature cows compared to heifers (first-calvers), and in cows that are not excessively thin or not severely feed restricted before calving.