



BEEF

November 2017

Grazing catch crops

With the option of putting in a catch crop under the Green, Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS), many farms have sown down tillage fields to the forage rape and stubble turnip mix for grazing by beef cattle over the winter. Under GLAS rules, the grazing of catch crops is not permitted until after December 1. When grazing a catch crop it should be strip grazed, with animals offered enough of the crop to feed them for one day only. The most important decision to make when strip grazing is the amount of fresh matter offered to the herd each day (i.e., the size of the strip). Getting the strip too small leads to underfeeding (loss of body condition), while a strip size too large will lead to overfeeding (high risk of sickening the animal) and poor utilisation of the

crop. For most, it will be trial and error until you get it right. Start off with a small allocation and build the allocation gradually – animals should be allowed to adjust slowly over at least a week.

Cattle fed a brassica crop such as fodder rape must also be fed a roughage source, otherwise they will be at risk of rumen acidosis. Usually when feeding brassicas, two-thirds of the diet is made up of the forage crop and the remainder is high dry matter grass silage or straw. The decision to use straw or silage will depend on availability, but also on the allocation of the forage crop. If the allocation is quite low relative to the requirement, silage will be needed to meet the energy requirements of the animal.

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A couple of other important points when it comes to feeding these types of catch crops:

- there should be a run-back area from the crop for stock;
- ensure the fencing is secure to prevent stock from breaking through and gorging themselves;
- feeding brassicas in frosty conditions is not recommended – in these conditions, allocate fresh breaks only after the frost has thawed each morning; and,
- brassica crops naturally contain compounds that reduce iodine uptake. Supplement with a good-quality mineral that has high levels of iodine. This is especially important for in-calf cows and breeding heifers.



When grazing a catch crop, only offer enough of the crop to be grazed in one day.

Fluke and pneumonia

Following the mild wet summer and the earlier housing of younger stock on many farms, there are a lot of reports of increased incidences of both fluke and pneumonia on beef farms. Left untreated, both these diseases can dramatically reduce the performance of stock. The fact that a percentage of the cattle slaughtered last spring had live liver fluke present in them indicates that a proper control strategy for fluke at or during housing is not in place on a proportion of farms. Most farmers will choose a flukicide based on price and convenience. This is fine but it will only be effective if it is used at the correct time. Check at purchase what the strategy is for the product you are buying. For example, if you are using a nitroxylnil-based product (e.g., Trodax) and you are only planning to treat cattle once, you must wait six to eight weeks after housing before giving it, otherwise it will not be effective against all the fluke present. Conditions this summer were also ideal for lungworm and damaged lungs are often the first

entry point for pneumonia to attack young stock. Cattle having clean, healthy lungs going into the shed goes a long way towards preventing an outbreak of pneumonia. If you are delaying your fluke treatment until later in the winter, do not leave animals untreated for stomach and lungworms in the meantime. More and more farmers are vaccinating young stock at housing against the common pneumonia diseases, as it reduces the number of sick animals, reduces the labour involved, avoids unnecessary drops in performance and reduces the amount of antibiotics used at farm level. Talk to your vet about the best options for your stock.



Where live liver fluke are observed in cattle slaughtered in the spring, it indicates that stock are not being treated correctly at housing for fluke.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Blazing a trail in Ballina

Tommy Holmes of Mayo is working hard to get around challenging conditions and make the most out of his herd.

All of the new Teagasc-*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER Beef Farm Challenge participants share a common goal – to reach their potential as beef farmers. In reaching their potential, they must produce as much beef as possible off grass.

Tommy Holmes, the BETTER Beef farm representative for Mayo, is leading the way in terms of growing and utilising grass among the group of BETTER Beef farmers around the country. Although he operates a small enterprise of 18ha, he is serious about making a healthy profit with a projected gross margin target of €1,557/ha.

It was a tough month in September for all farmers given the challenging ground conditions, with rainfall figures rocketing. Tommy's nearest weather station in Knock recorded 170mm for September, in comparison to 103mm for the same month last year. The considerable increase in rainfall has made it very difficult to graze

swards out and even keep stock out on many farms in the north west. Tommy however, has kept his head up taking it day by day, moving cattle regularly and getting through ground without poaching.

In mid September he made the decision to house his bulls, as they were touching into 500kg and he felt there wasn't the same kick in the grass. He also split his 20 cows into two groups, giving them 12-hour allocations using temporary reels and pigtails, ensuring cows were content having fresh grass under their noses at all times and also minimising poaching. He currently has an average farm cover of 1,379kg DM/ha and plans on housing all cows and calves by November 1.

Tommy has mastered the art of grassland management. If he can improve the quality of stock inside his farm gate, he will most certainly be one to watch!

November fertiliser

The Teagasc Grass10 campaign has been very active in recent months with demonstrations, farm walks and talks in many parts of the country. One of the 'newer' messages that is coming through from this campaign is that a lot of farmers do not seem to be aware that you can spread potash-only fertilisers in any month of the year. A total of 57% of the fields in the country are deficient in potassium (K). Many silage fields

especially are very low in it. By correcting a K deficiency, a field will grow an extra 1-3t grass DM/ha in the year (worth €100-€300). One bag of muriate of potash (0:0:50) per acre will bring up a deficient soil by a full index. Spreading K now is much safer than spreading high levels in the spring when it may cause grass tetany. Should some or all of your fields get a bag this November?

Short of feed?

Where stock have been housed for a number of months due to the poor weather and ground conditions this autumn, a significant amount of the fodder supplies for the winter will already have been eaten. Stretching out the remaining fodder so that it lasts until turnout next spring has to be a priority. Actions taken now will have a much bigger impact compared to waiting until there is a real crisis on your farm. The first step is to work out how much fodder you have left and then see what your options are.

- Is there fodder (silage/hay/straw) available to buy locally?
- Unless you have at least 50% of your forage requirements, it may not be the best option to buy silage or hay. Concentrates in this situation would offer better feed value and less feed variability.
- Can you dilute the diet to dry suckler cows with straw?
- Should some stock be sold earlier than you had planned?
- Should empty suckler cows be sold in the mart rather than finished?
- Heifers, steers or bulls being finished can be fed on mostly concentrates, with small amounts of roughage (speak to your adviser about how to do this safely).
- Look at the option of feeding the minimum amount of forage to certain groups of younger stock and feeding higher levels of concentrates. With this option, you are in many cases looking only for stock to maintain their weight over the winter.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Make things easier in spring

The lowering of spring workload needs to be a priority for many farms. It won't happen without planning. Long working days lead to tiredness and consequent increased risk of farm injury. November is a good time to reflect on what straightforward changes could cut spring workloads. A couple of simple adjustments could make a huge difference, e.g., contract spreading of fertiliser or slurry. On a more long-term basis, can farm modifications be

made to cut workload? Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes 2 (TAMS II) grant aid is available for a wide range of farm infrastructure developments and health and safety adaptations. In the meantime get winter ready, visit the website: <http://winterready.ie/>.

