

BEEF

July 2017

First year of KT groups draws to a close

After a two-month extension, the first year of the Knowledge Transfer (KT) Groups Programme is set to close at the end of this month. Most of you will have completed your five meetings, which may have included attending a national event. Your grassland plan, breeding plan and profit monitor should also be completed.

You should also have completed a work organisation sheet with your facilitator, which is aimed at making us all more safety conscious when you or your family are working on the farm. The other important component of your Farm Improvement Plan that has to be completed before July 31 is the herd health plan,



KT Groups Programme closes July 31.

which you will have to get your vet to complete. This is a real opportunity for you to engage with your vet on your farm to identify the health risks to your herd, and discover how you can be more proactive in preventing a disease outbreak. Take full advantage of engaging in the process, otherwise it will have been a missed opportunity.

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Grassland issues

Sward quality

So far this year, apart from the odd glitch, it has been a good grass year for both growth and utilisation. How is grazing ground looking on your farm? It is obvious from just visiting farms that some paddocks have got out of control in June, with cattle in grazing stemmy strong grass.

Strong paddocks should be taken out as silage, or topped to get rid of the stem and to promote a leafy regrowth, which is what is needed to maintain animal performance for the second half of the grazing season.

Young bucket-reared calves in particular need young leafy grass if they are to hit the targeted 0.9-1kg daily gain. Don't punish them by making them graze out strong grass. They should be offered choice leafy material and moved on. Ideally, let a group such as dry autumn sucklers or weaned ewes clean out the paddocks.

Reseed on time

If you are thinking of reseeding this autumn, you need to set the wheels in motion this month, particularly if you plan to burn off the old sward. At a cost of up to €300/acre, you need to maximise your chances of success. The ideal scenario is to have the reseeding completed by mid August. This will allow for better sward and clover establishment, which will become more vulnerable if reseeding is delayed into September. It will also allow you a greater window to use a post-emergence spray in the autumn to give you better control of seedling docks and chickweed.

You also need to make sure that soil pH is corrected by liming, and that soil phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) levels are being addressed. If liming and soil fertility are neglected, you are facing the prospect of reverting to weed grasses within a few years.

Animal health issues

Dosing

Autumn-born suckler calves and spring-born bucket-reared calves will have increasing worm burdens at this stage, and this will generally be borne out if you are faecal sampling. So you should consider dosing. Lungworm is that bit more unpredictable but if you hear calves coughing, including spring-born suckler calves, you need to dose. The type of product you use should be varied, but remember the benzimidazoles (white drenches) and levamisoles (yellow drenches) will only kill what is there on the day of dosing, and do not offer the persistency of the ivermectins. Yearling cattle that were well dosed as calves may also be vulnerable to a lungworm challenge.

BVD

The work to eradicate bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD Eradication Programme) has made significant progress in reducing the number of persistently infected (PI) calves born. For those of you vaccinating against the disease, you should keep doing so.

For those not vaccinating, you need to be extra careful around biosecurity measures for stock coming onto the farm. If cows in early pregnancy (30-120 days) are protected from infection, we will further reduce the number of PI calves born next spring. Speedy removal of any known PI calves should remain a priority.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Simplifying the system in Sligo

Glen McDermott will fly the flag for Sligo as he represents the county in the Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal BETTER Farm Challenge.

Glen, ably assisted by his son Dillon, runs a 41ha suckler farm in Castlebaldwin selling weanlings in the back end of the year. Land type is variable in nature, with approximately 60% of the land dry and free draining, while the remaining 40% is of a heavy, low-lying nature, with productivity being extremely poor. Glen has a split-calving system, calving down 22 cows in the autumn and a further 20 in spring. Coupled with this, he also works full-time off farm running a local pub and restaurant.

Recently, the programme team completed Glen's farm plan, working with local business and technology adviser, Peter Mullan. Going forward the system is to become more streamlined and all cows will calve in early spring. Calving in early spring ties in well with his off-farm job, as January and February are the quietest months of the year. Cash flow was highlighted as a big issue on the farm, with the majority of sales coming in October and November. Glen has invested

significantly in infrastructure over the past decade, so holding onto progeny for longer and moving away from selling weanlings makes sense given the accommodation that exists on the holding. However, soil fertility is a serious issue on the farm and in particular lime. The entire farm is deficient in lime and since joining the programme, 86t of lime has been spread to date. If Glen can get the farm growing more grass, he has the potential to be one of the top performers in Phase 3.



Glen has a split-calving system spread between autumn and spring.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Keep children safe

July is a high-risk month for childhood accidents, as children are often playing outdoors. Examine your farm for childhood hazards and remove them. Children should not be present when dangerous work is in

progress. Most importantly, discuss farm safety issues with children and young persons. Show a good example, as this is vital for positive attitude formation towards safety. Provide a safe play area for young children.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Reducing feed costs for beef cattle

Sinead Waters, David Kenny and Kate Keogh of Teagasc Grange report on the incorporation of selection for compensatory growth potential into breeding programmes.

Feed represents the largest cost to beef production systems. Thus, there is much interest in approaches to reduce the quantity of feed offered to beef cattle, particularly during the winter months, while at the same time maintaining animal performance. One such strategy is by exploiting compensatory growth, a natural phenomenon whereby following a period of undernutrition (e.g., over winter) cattle have the potential to undergo accelerated growth when subsequently offered unrestricted access to high-quality feed (e.g., pasture).

While this practice of 'storing' cattle over winter, prior to turnout to pasture in spring, has been practised for generations in Ireland, farmers are well aware of the variation in the growth response between individual animals. In order to examine this in more detail, the biology controlling this important trait and the reasons for inter-animal variation, a Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)-funded study was conducted at Teagasc Grange. A number of potential genetic markers associated with greater compensatory growth potential were identified and these are now being validated through a large on-farm study, again funded by SFI. As part of this study, 2,000 young



Teagasc researchers are looking at ways to reduce winter feed costs.

Holstein-Friesian bulls will be weighed regularly on participating farms during both store and finishing periods.

DNA profiles will be evaluated for genetic markers and subsequently associated with the degree of compensatory growth achieved by individual animals.

Validated genetic markers from this study will be incorporated into the national genomically-assisted breeding programme, with a view to more accurately identifying and breeding more feed-efficient and profitable cattle.