

BEEF

August 2018

Need for extra forage

The prolonged period of dry weather in the south and the east of the country has taken its toll on grass covers and silage crops. Many second cuts have been grazed or are severely back in yield.

This leaves many farms facing into a deficit of forage going into the winter.

We will need at least 50% of our forage requirement over the winter. With good soil temperatures, when the rain does arrive, growth will kick off and with a bit of luck continue well into the autumn. This will give you an opportunity to get 70-80 units nitrogen (N) per acre spread to take what essentially will be a third cut.

Even though they are back in yield, second cuts that have gone stemmy

should be cut at this stage and fertiliser got out for third cuts. With rising concentrate prices, we need to grow as much grass between now and the end of the year to reduce the deficit. Options to consider:

- taking on some additional ground for six to eight weeks to get a third cut;
- sourcing wholecrop barley/wheat or maize silage; and,
- in tillage areas, can alternative forages such as redstart, rape or fodder turnips be grown?

You should contact your local adviser about the options and if you haven't already done so, do a fodder budget.

Edited by
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Beef Specialist



DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Teagasc in conjunction with Dawn Meats will hold an open day on the **Newford Herd in Athenry on Wednesday September 5** from 2.00pm-6.00pm. The event will qualify as a knowledge transfer-approved national event. Topics to be covered:

- breeding and health
- physical and financial performance
- grassland management
- winter feeding

Grass10

Grass is the primary source of feed on our farms. It is important to quantify how much we have and to maximise utilisation. Drought conditions across the country have made grassland management decisions even more important going into the autumn and winter ahead.



Key messages:

- continue to measure grass on your farm and maximise utilisation;
- hold rotation length at 25-30 days to build grass for the autumn;
- every farm should maintain grazing residuals of 4cm – meeting residuals is critical in maximising utilisation;
- avoid topping, as its wasting feed available to livestock and will also inhibit regrowth on these paddocks;
- wean spring calves early this year (minimum 250kg) – lighter weanlings should be forward creep grazed (raised wire) and supplemented with concentrates;
- in the drought in 1995, we received a period of high growth rates in the autumn – if we get a good autumn, we must build grass to extend the grazing season and cut surplus bales when given an opportunity;
- scan early this year and empty cows should be culled – under-performing cows (late calvers, etc.) should be culled to reduce demand for grass and also winter feed;
- any stock that is fit for sale should be sold to reduce demand for autumn grass and winter feed;
- complete a fodder budget for next winter – if you are short silage, you may have to supplement alternative feeds other than silage to stretch your silage reserves, be proactive;
- try and source winter feed now– hay, straw, etc.; and,



- spread lime on grazing ground and where silage has been cut in the autumn (2 tonnes/acre).

Fertiliser

Nitrogen should still be spread to maximise growth rates. A lack of N will lead to poor growth rates and reduced quality in pasture. If we get a period of growth in the autumn, we must spread enough N to build grass and to cut surplus bales.

There are no issues with spreading a product like CAN and applying lime on the same paddock.

Target slurry to index 1 and 2 soils to build/replenish phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) levels. Where additional K is applied as muriate of potash, aim to apply in August/September.

Future plant growth

In a drought, spring tillers die and the remaining tillers are stressed. The period following drought is critical to allow autumn tillering to occur, otherwise pastures will thin out over autumn, production will be poor, and weeds will invade.

Plants that are still alive but growing slowly due to lack of moisture can quickly recover, green

up, and be back into production. Dormant plants where above-ground parts have died back, but buds at ground level are surviving, can begin tillering from these buds when rain falls.

New green shoots can be seen in the base of dead pasture within one to two weeks after rainfall, but recovery in terms of pasture growth rates will still be some weeks away.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Ambition to grow

Ger McSweeney farms 40ha of mainly heavy land in Milstreet, Co. Cork and is looking to use the BETTER Farm Programme to increase his level of stock.



Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal

BETTER FARM BEEF CHALLENGE

Ger is currently stocked relatively lowly, at around 1.2LU/ha but hopes to increase this over the course of the BETTER Farm Programme.

The farm is currently starting to run tight, with 15 days grass ahead and growth rates running under 20kg/DM/ha. Cows and calves are being supplemented with hay, which Ger purchased.

This is slowing down the rotation. Store heifers are eating 2kg per day also to reduce grass requirement.

Second-cut silage is expected to be harvested in the next week. Once this is completed, the expected shortfall in winter fodder is going to be 40-50 bales of silage. The biggest issue will arise if a large quantity

of silage has to be fed due continuing poor grass growth. If deficits are identified in the autumn, a decision will have to be made regarding purchasing winter fodder or reducing stock numbers.

Three acres of heavy land has been reclaimed by installing a shallow drainage system.

Drains are installed at a depth of 1m, with drainage stone filled to within eight inches of the surface. Some groundwater springs have been identified and diverted to open drains.

Hopefully once the land is reseeded and fenced, it will prove a useful portion of land. The estimated total cost of this will be around €2,000 per acre.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Concentrate on oats

Mark McGee and Aidan Moloney Teagasc, Grange performed a comparison of rolled barley and oats as supplements to grass silage for finishing beef cattle.

The effects of replacing rolled barley with rolled oats in a supplement on intake, growth, carcass and selected meat quality traits of late-maturing breed steers (initial live weight, 443kg), over a 134-day finishing period, was examined. Animals were housed in pens in a slatted floor shed and offered grass silage (dry matter digestibility, 713g/kg) *ad libitum* plus 4.0kg dry matter (in two feeds) daily, of one of two concentrate supplements: one barley-based 'control' (862g rolled barley, 60g soya bean meal, 50g molasses, and 28g minerals and vitamins/kg fresh weight); and, and the other oat based (853g rolled oats, 70g soya bean meal, 50g molasses, and 27g minerals and vitamins/kg fresh weight).

Concentrates were prepared as coarse mixtures. Replacement of barley with oats in the concentrate supplement had no effect on silage dry matter intake, average daily live weight gain, feed conversion ratio, slaughter and carcass weight, kill-out proportion, ultrasonic measures of body muscle and fat gain, and carcass conformation and carcass fat score. Muscle colour, pH and drip loss, and subcutaneous fat colour did not differ between the two concentrates. In conclusion, under the conditions of this experiment, rolled oats can replace rolled barley in a concentrate supplement to high-digestibility grass silage, without negatively affecting performance or selected meat quality traits of beef cattle.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Managing stress

Farming into the autumn will be dominated by the drought conditions. Drought has the potential to cause stress due to feeding and financial problems, which in turn lead to accidents and ill health. The major stressors in farming are excess workload, unsafe conditions, financial worry and poor working relationships. The key to dealing with stress is firstly to identify its source and take positive steps to solve the problem. Communication with social networks such as advisors, merchants, bankers and fellow farmers is also key to managing stress.



Seek social supports.