

BEEF

October 2018

Make provisions for the winter

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Take a serious look at your herd; are there options to sell some cattle before the winter? Plain cattle have hit a poor trade but cull cows may still be an option. Housing a suckler cow in October at 680kg and finishing in January on silage and meal will cost about €400. She should gain 120kg and slaughter at a 400kg carcass. Looking at stock on the farm, the following monthly feed costs need to be budgeted for: you must also allow for other costs such as your vet and bedding.

From **Table 1** it is clear that if you are buying in silage at a cost of €30/t or above it makes good economic sense to restrict silage to dry suckler cows and stores, and feed extra meal where meal is available at €300/t. For this system to work you need to restrict the silage being fed and allow access to meal for all stock at the same time.

This may mean feeding at the back of suckler cow pens as well as the front or allowing cattle access to extra troughs in yards.

Table 1: Monthly feed costs.

	<i>Ad lib</i> silage (€30/t)+ meal (€300/t)	Silage restricted to 50% and extra meal fed
Calved suckler cow	€60	€66
Dry suckler cow	€42	€39
Store/in-calf heifer	€48	€47
Weanling	€30	€39
Silage: +/- €10/t	+/- €14 for sucklers and stores +/- €7 for sucklers and stores	+/- €7 for sucklers and stores +/- €4 for weanlings

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Time to start the grazing season!



The aims for autumn grazing are to adequately feed animals on grass and set the farm up for spring grass.



By John Maher, Teagasc, Moorepark.

There are two objectives in autumn grazing management. Firstly, the animals must be adequately fed using the cheapest available feed, which is grazed grass. Every day at grass is worth €2/cow/day additional profit. The second objective is to set the farm up for spring grass. Many farmers do not realise that the grazing season begins in the autumn and that autumn management of grazed grass is the primary factor influencing the supply of grass available in spring on any farm.

Start of closing

The last rotation should begin around October 7-10 for most farms. On farms with a difficult soil type, closing up should begin in last days of September.

Every one week delay in closing up the farm past the target of October 10 will reduce grass supply in spring by 100kg DM/ha. Later closing will also reduce the level of autumn and winter grass growth.

Spread potassium

Many soils are deficient in potassium (K) also and this time of year is a good time to tackle K deficiency.

Silage ground is particularly deficient in K on many farms.

Try to spread muriate of potash (0-0-50) during a dry spell if you can, during October if your K index is low (Index 1 or 2). One bag/acre of 0:0:50 applied will generally result in the soil rising an index, i.e., moving from index 2 to index 3.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Nutrition for suckler herds

David Kenny of Teagasc, AGRIC, Grange reports on research into autumn nutritional management of spring-calving suckler herds to support optimal reproductive performance.

Autumn and winter are key periods for the nutritional management of both spring-calving suckler cows and weanling heifers destined to be herd replacements.

Replacement heifers must meet target body weight to ensure that the majority are undergoing normal heat cycles ahead of the breeding season next summer. The results of ongoing Teagasc work on this subject will be the subject of a subsequent article. Following weaning, excessive body condition loss in lactating cows should be avoided and thin cows should be allowed to build up condition again ahead of winter housing. At housing, excessively thin cows should be penned separately and offered unrestricted access to moderate to good quality silage. Cow body condition score (BCS; estimate fat reserves) is a practical management tool that farmers can use to monitor the nutritional status of their cows. A series of target condition scores can be used to manage feed requirements, thereby ensuring that cows are in the correct condition at the key stages of the reproductive cycle, namely weaning, calving and during the breeding season. Target BCS (1 BCS equivalent to 75-100kg body weight) for spring calving cows is summarised in **Table 2**.

Feeding the pregnant suckler cow

The manipulation of cow BCS between winter and summer is an important strategy in controlling feed costs.

For cost effective feed management, the key is to economically build up body reserves from grazed grass and utilise these reserves over the winter when feed costs are highest, thus diluting overall feed costs. For example, achieving target BCS at weaning and calving can lead to a winter feed saving of 1.0-1.5 tonnes of grass silage. In simple monetary terms, this is equivalent to a €35-€40 or greater saving per cow (around €2,000 annually for a herd of 50 cows).

The requirement for supplementary minerals is significantly lower for sucklers compared with dairy cows. However, a good-quality pre-calving mineral supplement should be offered by way of dusting on top of the silage (120g/day of a standard pre-calving mineral mix) for at least six weeks ahead of expected calving date.

For best results, offer at least twice a day and ensure adequate feeding space (600mm/cow feed space at the barrier) is afforded to cows.

Table 2: Minimum target BCS for beef cows (0 = emaciated; 5= obese).

Calving season	Calving	Mating	Mid pregnancy
January-February	3.0	2.5	3.0
March-May	2.75	2.5	3.0
Autumn	3.25	2.75	2.25



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Fodder shortage

The severe weather conditions have meant one Cork farmer has had to make some tough decisions and put off expansion for a year.

John McSweeney farms 25ha of mainly dry land in Lissarda, Co. Cork. He runs a split system of suckler to finish and dairy calf to beef in a high stocking rate/high output system. This year affected John badly in terms of the very bad spring which led to increased meal bills and the severe summer drought which meant little silage left in the yard by August and a substantial meal input to keep stock thriving. John had to take action to reduce stocking rate during the worst of the drought when growth levels fell to below 10kg DM/ha/day. Young stock were sold live for export in July and forward bulls were housed and built up to *ad lib* ration plus straw for finishing. Cows were scanned in July and empty cows were segregated from the main herd and built up onto high levels of meal before being slaughtered in August and September.

A crop of Redstart, which is a hybrid of rape and kale, was sown into six acres of silage ground that had been earmarked for reseeding. It was sown on July 31 following ploughing. It received one bag/acre of 18-6-12 at sowing, followed by two bags of 18-6-12/acre at emergence. It received another two bags/acre of CAN three weeks later when the crop began to show signs of nitrogen (N) deficiency. It is hoped to graze this crop from late October to January with weanlings. They will have access to silage also as a roughage source and iodine will be provided in the water. John has also purchased a large amount of silage and straw to make up the winter feed deficit. While he now has enough feed to last a five month winter, it has come at a significant cost to the farm and will curtail further expansion by a year until finances are back in order and stock numbers are rebuilt.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Important checks for winter

The clocks go back on October 28 as winter and darkness set in. Get ready for the winter months. Check that your safety electrical switches or 32mA residual current devices (RCDs) are tripping correctly. An Irish study has shown that 15% do not trip when tested. Consult the ESB Networks booklet 'Farm Well

... Farm Safely' for further information. Check that farmyard lighting is adequate. An Irish study has shown that poor lighting is associated with farm accidents. Also, check that fire/smoke alarms in the home are in working order.

