

## Safely controlling weeds in grassland

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*Never spray MCPA in wet conditions.*

Commonly used herbicides like MCPA (e.g., Mortone, Agritox, M50, Lupo) are used to control rushes in grassland. MCPA is very soluble so it can travel easily in waterlogged areas or water bodies and is being found in drinking water sources. MCPA takes several weeks to break down, and can persist in surface water for some time. When using grassland herbicides (especially MCPA):

- mechanical control and good soil fertility should be the first option and then spray the regrowth

and target only the rush-affected areas;

- ensure that the sprayer operator is aware of any drinking water abstraction points or wells in the local area (5m to 200m safe guard zones);
- do not fill sprayers from watercourses;
- don't apply MCPA if the soil is water logged or if there is rain forecast;
- only apply MCPA if the grass and rushes are dry and avoid windy days;
- all MCPA products have a 5m buffer zone (cannot spray within five metres) from watercourses (this includes any dry drains that could hold water);
- all pesticide containers should be triple rinsed after use with the rinse put into the sprayer;
- all foil lids from containers should be put back into the triple-rinsed containers and the cap should be screwed tightly on; and,
- only glyphosate products can be used in weed lickers.

## RESEARCH UPDATE

### Grange dairy calf-to-beef system evaluation

Nicky Byrne and Donall Fahy of Teagasc, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath report on a new trial which is evaluating dairy calf-to-beef systems.

Annually, approximately 900,000 calves from the dairy herd are available to enter beef production systems. However, given the low contribution of calf sales to overall profit of dairy farms, little emphasis is placed on sire selection for characteristics other than calving ease, gestation length and breed. It is not surprising therefore that an increasing number of animals are failing to meet the specifications of the quality payment system (QPS).

To provide improved direction, a new complete farm system trial was developed at Teagasc, Grange in spring 2018, to establish the contribution of animal genotype to the overall physical and financial performance of dairy beef systems. The objective of this trial is to assess the terminal performance of dairy-bred calves sired by beef and dairy bulls of

divergent genetic potential for carcass traits. Holstein Friesian (HF) and Angus (AA) sires were selected as they represent the main calf breeds coming from the dairy herd, respectively. Progeny from bulls under 3.5% calving difficulty with a minimum terminal index reliability of 60% and from HF dams served between March 27 and June 25 are used in this study. A total 120 male calves are purchased each year.

Three animal genotype groups were formed, with each having their own individual farmlet that implemented an intensive grass-based, under-24 month steer production system. In all, 40 high (sired by six high carcass weight and conformation AA bulls), 40 low (sired by six low carcass weight and conformation AA bulls) and 40 HF (sired by top four Economic

## BETTER FARM UPDATE

### A good start

BETTER Farm participant Brian Doran of Co. Wicklow is determined to make this calving season a success.

So far so good on the calving front for Brian Doran, Wicklow's participant in the Teagasc/*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER farm beef challenge. He has put the difficulties he encountered last year well behind him and took a number of proactive steps to make this calving season a success. Cows were restricted on 72% DMD

silage and were given straw to keep them in good condition and fit for calving. Cows were also given pre-calving minerals and along with this, they were supplemented with 1kg soya bean meal a month before calving and both worked well, as cows were calving down with lots of colostrum and calves had good vigour. Along with changing cow nutrition, Brian also fitted extra individual calving pens to give the cow and calf longer to bond. The rewards of a thorough herd health plan, which incorporated a strict vaccination policy including IBR,



Breeding Index (EBI) HF bulls). Each farmlet is stocked at 2.7LU/ha, consisting of 40 calves (0-12 months) and 40 yearlings (12-24 months).

### Calf rearing

Calves arrive on farm at approximately 21 days weighing 55kg. Calves are assigned to two different milk feeding levels, either 4L or 8L per calf per day. Milk feeding treatments are balanced by sire, arrival weight and age. All calves have *ad lib* access to concentrate over the rearing period, with individual milk and concentrate intakes recorded. Calves are weaned at a target weight of 85kg.

### Grassland

The level of herbage production and utilisation will be recorded for each farmlet. A weekly grass walk is undertaken to facilitate grassland management and feed budgeting decisions, using PastureBase Ireland. Prior to each genotype group (leader follower system)

entering a paddock, pre-grazing herbage mass and sward quality are measured (harvested), as is post-grazing sward height. The farmlets consist of a mixture of free draining and heavy soils, of which approximately 50% have been reseeded with perennial ryegrass variety monocultures. To help maximise grass utilisation, much work has been carried out on paddock infrastructure and drainage. The effects of animal genotype and various sward characteristics on grazing behaviour will be assessed.

This trial has the ability to determine the merit of using elite beef genetics on the dairy herd, while analysing overall system functionality. The data captured from this trial will provide an improved blueprint for dairy calf-to-beef production systems. Herd updates will be available on the Teagasc website and weekly grassland details on the PastureBase Ireland home page.

pneumonia, scour and leptospirosis, put in place for the farm last year were clearly evident, with a trouble-free winter with no illness issue in stock. Stock were turned out earlier in the month but had to be rehoused due to the high level of rainfall but the infrastructure is in place and as soon as conditions allow, they will be turned out again. Stock performed well over the winter with



weanlings averaging 0.7kg a day. They were given good quality silage, 1kg of barley and 0.5kg of soya bean meal.

## Upcoming BETTER FARM events

April 4: 2pm-4pm – Maurice Hearne, Leperstown, Dunmore East, Co. Waterford, X91 R279

April 11: 1pm-3pm – Richard Milligan, Robertstown House, Roberstown, Naas, Co. Kildare, W91 TY32

## BEEP weighing scales available this month

There are three options for sourcing a weighing platform in Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme (BEEP):

1. Owned scales.
2. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) rental scales through the BEEP network.
3. Third party (borrowed, private technician).

All owned and third-party scales need to be registered before you start weighing:

- ▶ owned scales can be registered online through the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) website or by phone (023-883 2883);
- ▶ DAFM rental scales will already be registered and they will be available by mid April through the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS) network which includes co-ops, etc., they can be booked online by using the [www.mybeep.ie](http://www.mybeep.ie) website and payment can be made on collection – there will be approximately 400-500 weighing platforms

available nationwide for rental; and,

- ▶ third-party scales can be registered by phone (023-883 2883). If you are going to use a third-party scales, then you must get the registration number of the scales from the owner before you submit weights.

### Submitting weights

Once recorded, weights can be submitted online or on paper forms. Online options include using a mobile phone app, by computer through [www.icbf.com](http://www.icbf.com), or if you are using an existing farm software package through their existing recording screens.

If you which to submit weights on paper, then you will have to request forms from the ICBF and they will be posted out. Remember, the eligible cow and calf team must be weighed individually and on the same day. In all cases it is the responsibility of the participating farmer to ensure that the weights are submitted.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Be careful with tractors and ATVs

Farming moves fully outdoors during April as the busy grass and crop growing season gets into top gear. Farm accidents spike during busy periods so heightened safety vigilance is needed. Fatal accidents at this time of year are mainly associated with farm vehicles particularly tractors and ATVs. With tractors it is



vital to watch out for bystanders and be conscious of parking vehicles correctly. With ATVs it is vital to keep in control by controlling throttle speed and shifting one's weight as counterbalance. Wear a certified helmet.

*Operate ATVs safely.*

