

Weanlings – don't lose ground over the first winter

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Meal prices are more competitive this year compared to last year and weanlings are more efficient than store cattle, so feeding them well over the first winter pays. For weanlings going to grass next spring, the target gain should be around 0.6kg/day over the winter. This will allow them to grow frame but will also allow them to

benefit from a much cheaper compensatory growth once they get to grass. The reality from weighings though is that on-farm performance is much nearer 0-0.3kg/day, leaving them stunted. Once you are happy they are covered with regard to dosing, vaccination and for fluke, you can focus on the nutrition. Knowing the quality of your silage will determine what meal feeding level you will need to feed. A number of years ago, Teagasc

Table 1: Winter weanling performance on 17 commercial farms.

Performance	Satisfactory (0.55kg/day) n=9	Poor (0.2kg/day) n=8
Average silage DMD	67.4%	66.6%
Total meal fed/weanling	280kg	160kg
Meal feeding pattern	kg/head/day	kg/head/day
First two months	2.19	1.07
Next two months	1.83	1.07
Last months	1.08	0.86

looked at weanling performance on 17 commercial farms (**Table 1**). A number of lessons came out of that study. All farms fed a similar quality silage at around 67% DMD. The better-performing farms all front loaded the meal at the start of the winter and consequently fed more meal. Feeding 120kg of extra meal delivered an extra 50kg of liveweight by turnout. So for an extra €30 on meal spend we gained around €100 in liveweight.

Storing cattle over the winter



If prices were to begin to rise then you will have an opportunity, even into the New Year, to push cattle to finish out of the shed.

Finishing cattle for the last 18 months hasn't been a straightforward business and the current overhang of cattle has just added to an already poor situation. Our advisers have had a number of queries in the last few months about storing cattle over the winter on silage, with a view to turning them out next spring and finishing them off grass next summer/autumn. This has all been driven by the poor prospects from winter finishing as people try to reduce their concentrate costs, and more importantly, try to buy some time to allow the market to correct itself.

In order to store these cattle you would ideally still like them to gain around 0.5kg/day over the winter. Whether they can achieve this or not on silage only depends on the silage quality. A silage of 72% plus DMD would sustain the 0.5kg/day on its own, whereas a 67% DMD silage would need to be supplemented with around 2kg of concentrate for the same gain. So as with the weanlings you

should have your silage tested.

For those of you who have started the winter storing cattle, you should be watching the signals from the market. If prices were to begin to rise then you will have an opportunity even into the New Year to push cattle to finish out of the shed. Our research shows that by moving cattle onto an *ad lib* concentrate diet over a two to three-week period, you can get good performance and the optimum period of finishing will depend on the stock type. But only finish out of the shed if it stacks up economically (**Table 2**).

Table 2: Guidelines for duration of finishing period on *ad libitum* concentrates.

	Days	Average daily gain (ADG) (kg)
Heifers	60-80	1.10-1.30
Steers	70-90	1.25-1.45
Bulls	<180 (80-120)	1.70-1.90

Building the foundations for grass finishing

The nutrition provided to dairy-beef weanlings over the course of the first winter is often overlooked at farm level, generally at a cost in terms of lost production. Along with the calf-rearing phase and the first summer at pasture, this area is critical to ensure the correct foundation is laid for finishing – regardless of system. A key element of Richard Long's farm plan, the Co. Waterford representative in the Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme, is to finish early-maturing Angus and Hereford heifers off grass at 19-20 months. For this to be achieved, a minimum average daily gain (ADG) of at least 0.6kg/day is required over the housing period. Silage analysis conducted in November on Richard's first-cut silage identified a dry matter digestibility (DMD) of 70.3%, and a crude protein content of 13.6%.

Although slightly below the 72-74% DMD targeted for calf-to-beef systems, earlier cutting has resulted in a 3% increase compared to the silage offered last winter. Given the silage quality available, weanlings will be offered 1.5-2.0kg/day of concentrate during the housing period in a front-loaded manner to ensure the best possible use is made out of grass next spring.

A concentrate protein content of 16% is needed to ensure weanlings lay down frame and muscle



over the winter months, while a UFL content of 0.90-0.96 is required.

With this level of feeding it is envisaged that these heifers will weigh approximately 300kg next March. When conditions allow, the lighter heifers in the bunch will be identified and turned out to grass in order to 'catch up' with their heavier comrades.

In 2019, Richard's early-maturing heifers – destined for slaughter at 20 months – gained 0.9-1kg/day at pasture. If this level of performance is repeated in 2020, these early-maturing heifers will reach approximately 510kg in mid October to produce a 250kg carcass (49% kill out) – 6kg heavier than the average carcass produced at 24.3 months in 2018/2019.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Prevent fire deaths

Fire can be a source of tragedy, particularly in winter. A recent Health Research Board (HRB) study shows that farmers and agricultural workers account for 20% of national fire deaths. It also shows that almost all fires occurred in private dwellings.



Contributory factors include smoking, high alcohol consumption, plugged-in or faulty electrical devices, open fires, and frying or chip pans. A small number of fires are linked to burning candles. Give fire safety your attention. Fire safety advice is available at <http://firesafetyweek.ie/>.



Date for your diary

National Beef Conference 2019
'Irish Beef – A Changing Landscape'
Tuesday,
10th December | 6pm
McWilliam Park Hotel,
Claremorris

The Teagasc National Beef Conference will take place on December 10 in The McWilliam Park Hotel in Claremorris, Co. Mayo. The conference will run from 6.00pm-9.00pm. The theme for this year's Conference is: 'Irish Beef – A Changing Landscape'. With the end of the

current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Brexit, climate change and Mercusor all topical, we will be asking a panel of experts to discuss how they see the future of the Irish beef industry evolving, and what can we expect regarding future policy. There will also be a number of papers covering topics, such as:

- what can new markets deliver for Irish beef?;
 - what practical efficiencies have been working on suckler farms?;
 - do genetics and gender affect meat-eating quality?; and,
 - what have BEEP and BDGP taught us?
- Admission is free and you are all welcome.

Season's greetings

Can we also take this opportunity to wish you and your family a very Happy Christmas and we hope that 2020 will deliver a less turbulent and more profitable beef sector.

