

BEEF

October 2022

Autumn grass planner

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Knowledge Transfer

Your grazing management plan in October will determine how much grass you will have on your farm next February and March. Farms that are targeting to turn at least some stock out between Valentine's Day and St Patrick's Day need to start closing-up fields and paddocks no later than October 10. These fields will continue to grow grass over the coming weeks, building up covers that will remain there over winter. As these are the fields you will be grazing first in the spring, you should choose the drier parts of the farm that

give you the best chance for an early turnout. The target should be to stop grazing 15% of your farm per week between now and November 10. The remaining 40% of the farm can then be grazed up until all stock are housed for the winter. Before closing make sure swards are well grazed out, allowing light to reach the base of the plant. This is important as it encourages tillering over the winter months and is especially important if you are trying to maintain the white clover content of your sward.

Meal feeding calves and weanlings

Dairy-bred calves need to be supplemented at grass in the autumn to ensure they continue to grow. While the protein in grass is high at this time of the year, the energy is dropping. Depending on grass supply and weather



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conditions, calves should be fed between 1.0 and 1.5kg of concentrate per head per day until housing. The crude protein in the ration should be between 12 and 14% in the dry matter. Suckler-bred weanlings will also benefit from meal feeding at this time of the year. Bull calves

that are being targeted for finishing under 16 months of age and heifer weanlings that you intend putting in calf next spring are priority stock for feeding. The bulls should be built up onto 2-3kg of a ration, while the replacement heifers should be on at least 1.5kg.

Silage quality and quantity

Have you tested your grass silage this year? With lower levels of fertiliser spread this year and delayed cutting dates on many farms, the suspicion is that silage quality may be lower than in previous years. Alternatively, where crops were cut at the correct grass growth stage and quality is good, there may be an opportunity to cut back on the amount of meal that needs to be fed to growing cattle in a year where meal prices are rising fast. Either way you need to send in your silage samples so that you

can make an informed decision. Many farmers in the south and east of the country had to feed a proportion of their winter feed stocks in August and September due to the lack of grass growth. Completing a fodder budget sooner rather than later is an important job this month to ensure you have time to take action if you are short. PastureBase Ireland has an excellent programme to help you to complete this budget. Be realistic on the likely length of the winter feeding period for your farm and build in a 20% buffer.

Vaccination

A pneumonia outbreak around housing is one of the leading causes of death in beef weanlings. Stress, overcrowding and poor ventilation are the main reasons for these outbreaks. Losses are common and even where deaths are kept to a minimum, there is a long-term impact on animal performance, with significantly increased workloads and disruption all round. While improving the management and housing of weanlings goes a long way towards reducing pneumonia, having a vaccination programme that covers the main respiratory diseases in advance of the housing

period should be considered on all farms. Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), parainfluenza-3 (PI3) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are the three main causes of infection. Speak to your vet about which products you should use coming into the autumn. If you vaccinated calves in the spring, you only need to give single booster shots now. If however these are their first vaccinations, you may have to give a primary and a booster shot. Shop around for the best value as there can be huge differences in the prices charged from one veterinary practice to the next for the exact same products.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Food-feed competition



PAUL CROSSON, PETER DOYLE and MARK KEARNEY report on research at Teagasc Grange on the implications for beef cattle production systems of food-feed competition.

Beef cattle consume human-inedible forages and by-product feedstuffs and convert them into high value human food in the form of beef meat. In doing so, they make a critical contribution to human food security. However, human-edible cereal grains are also often fed to beef cattle as animal feed, and this diminishes the contribution of livestock to net human food production. A number of studies at Teagasc Grange have evaluated contrasting beef cattle production systems in terms of the ratio of human-edible protein and energy produced (i.e., meat) to human-edible protein and energy fed to livestock (i.e., mainly cereal grains). In one study, spring-born suckler weanlings were assigned to one of three production systems, whereby the percentage of forage (grazed pasture plus grass silage) in the diet was 61% (intensive concentrate-based finishing of steers at 21 months of age), 84% (conventional, two-year old steer beef system), and 100% (finishing steers at 28 months of age during the third grazing season with no concentrates fed in their lifetime). From a human-edible protein and energy perspective, systems where concentrate feeding was included in the diet (i.e., 21-month and two-year old steer systems) were net consumers, whereas the forage-only system was a net producer. In another study, the effects of alternative dairy-beef production systems differing with respect to age at slaughter and finishing diet were modelled. Production systems incorporated the spring-born

steer progeny of early-maturing sires bred to Holstein Friesian dams slaughtered at 20, 24 or 28 months of age according to typical production blueprints. Although the 28-month system (finished during the third grazing season) had the lowest human-edible protein and energy output, it was the only system that was a net producer of human-edible protein and energy. Research at Grange is further evaluating dietary and system factors related to food-feed competition. For example, digestible indigestible amino acid scores (DIAAS) in beef meat are much greater than that of proteins in the human-edible plant protein inputs, due to the amino acid composition and its associated bioavailability in beef to meet human amino acid requirements. Accounting for this would improve the food-feed ratio in favour of ruminant systems. Furthermore, in addition to protein and energy, beef meat is a source of micronutrients which are essential for good health throughout life. In terms of production systems, reducing concentrate feed requirements remains an important objective; apart from food security considerations this is particularly pertinent given the rapid escalation in feed prices in recent years. Where concentrate feeding is deemed necessary, the constituent ingredients in feed rations also have implications for food-feed ratios, with the use of 'by-products' (e.g., from the brewing, distilling and food industries) in animal rations instead of cereal grains reducing human food competition.

New calf-to-beef course



Teagasc will commence a new advanced dairy calf-to-beef course in October 2022 as part of the DairyBeef 500

campaign. This course is designed to help farmers plan and implement a dairy calf-to-beef system on their farm, which will allow them to maximise their resources while at the same time hitting the key performance indicators that need to be met to ensure that

their farm is operating at a high level of profitability. The course will involve visits to the Teagasc Grange research centre and commercial farms that are operating successful dairy calf-to-beef enterprises. The course will be offered over four full days (in 12 months) and will cover topics such as calf genetics, choosing the right calf-to-beef system, animal health, calf rearing, and other related topics. For more information, log on to: www.teagasc.ie.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Winter and well-being

Get ready for the winter. With animals returning indoors the yard will become very busy. It is important to check that your safety electrical switches or residual current devices (RCD) are working correctly. Check that farmyard lighting is adequate, as poor lighting is associated with farm accidents. If replacing bulbs or cleaning lenses always use appropriate equipment to gain access to the height. If you're in doubt or need advice always contact a qualified electrician.

Five Ways to Well-Being

Life can be hectic at times, but taking time to incorporate one or more of the Five Ways to Well-Being published by Mental Health Ireland into your life can help you function well and feel good.

1. Make the time each day to connect with other

people around you.

2. Be active – discover a physical activity that you enjoy.
3. Be aware and take notice of the world around you, e.g., the changing seasons.
4. Keep learning – try something new, set yourself a new challenge.
5. Give – giving to others is good for you.



If in doubt about anything electrical, contact an electrician.