

Autumn tasks to reduce winter costs

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As we move towards autumn time there are a number of tasks that need to be completed before the winter housing period sets in.

1. Scanning of suckler cows

Bulls should have been removed from most spring-calving herds by mid July, with scanning happening four weeks later. This year more than ever it is very important to pick out empty cows and target to sell live or slaughter before the winter begins. Prices for culls are still at a much higher level than in any previous year and winter feed costs in terms of silage, meal and contractor costs for slurry spreading are also at record levels. It makes sense to target an autumn sale for these cows off grass, either for further feeding or finishing.

2. Lime applications

Lime is the one fertiliser that hasn't risen much

in price this year. Given the cost of fertiliser now, and the likely costs for the year ahead, it is of the utmost importance that any fertiliser applied is working efficiently next year. Applying lime this autumn gives you a better return on your investment. Refer to your most recent set of soil tests and apply as soon as possible.

3. Build grass covers

For low-stocked farms, grass covers will naturally build once silage cutting ceases, provided stocking rate doesn't increase dramatically. Second cuts should be wrapped up by early August at the latest, with the last of surplus bales taken by mid August. Generally, rotation length should be extended from August 10. The focus of this period is to gradually build pre-grazing herbage mass,

targeting covers of 2,000-2,300kg DM/ha in mid September.

4. Weighing actions

Calves need to be weighed for the Dairy Beef Calf Programme, with weights uploaded on the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) website within seven days.

Cows and calves must be weighed also as part of Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme – Sucklers (BEEP-S) obligations.

Farmers should also take the opportunity to weigh forward stores at grass. Store cattle, particularly heifers and early maturing breeds, may be at the stage of laying down fat at the tail head and could be finished off grass with a small amount of concentrates before housing.

This year with concentrate prices likely to be high, this could represent a big saving for the farmer.


5. Dosing and faecal egg testing

Only treat cattle for stomach worms when you know there is a need to treat them. Taking fresh dung samples from suckler weanlings and getting a faecal egg count (FEC) test done is an ideal way to tell whether or not they need to be treated for stomachs worms. Once you have established that you have a worm burden on your farm, you can then decide on which product to use. Failure to treat worm burdens in either calves or one- to two-year old stock can have a major effect on thrive.

Climate Actions for August



Catch crops are a very useful tool to catch any residual nutrients following a cereal crop




Apply lime to low pH grassland and crop soils



Build Autumn grass by spreading 20-25 kg N/ha using protected urea in August, when you get the best response in grass growth



Check milk recording and bulk milk health screening reports (dairy) or faecal egg count report (BEEP-S) for issues that need to be resolved



If feeding ration at grass - feed maximum 12-14% crude protein



Empty your slurry tanks

RESEARCH UPDATE



Dairy calf-to-beef research

NICKY BYRNE, DONALL FAHY and JAMIE O'DRISCOLL of AGRIC, Teagasc, Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath examined strategies to facilitate dairy-beef systems of reduced slaughter age.

Not all dairy-beef animals have the same 'ability' to meet required carcass specifications at young ages when produced on a grass-based diet. Given these factors and the policy ambition to reduce age at slaughter in the national beef herd, a new study was formed to investigate the role of genetic selection for reduced age at slaughter and supplementation during the grazing season on the biological, economic and environmental performance of dairy-beef systems. For the purpose of this study, an estimated breeding value was generated to identify animals with the potential to produce an 'in-spec' carcass at a younger age: EARLY (younger age at slaughter); and, LATE (older age at slaughter). An in-spec carcass is defined here as having a fat score between 3= and 4- and a carcass weight between 270kg and 380kg.

Male calves from Holstein Friesian (HF) cows mated to Angus (AA) sires divergent in genetic

potential for 'age at slaughter' or mated to high-Economic Breeding Index (EBI) HF sires were purchased at three weeks of age. These three genetic groups were then assigned to experimental treatments, differing in concentrate supplementation during the first and second grazing seasons: grass-only for both grazing seasons (grass-only, GO); calves supplemented with 1kg concentrate daily for the first, and grass-only for the second grazing season (INTER); and, calves supplemented with 1kg for the first grazing season and from July, 4kg for the second grazing season (HIGH). Animals were drafted for slaughter based on a targeted body condition score (BCS) of 3.75, equating to a targeted carcass fatness of 3= to 4-. Preliminary analysis from the first year of this study showed that across the concentrate feeding systems, EARLY steers produced an additional 30kg of carcass at a similar slaughter age compared to LATE steers (Table 1).

Table 1: Slaughter performance of dairy-beef steers managed on grass-only (GO) or grass supplemented with concentrates (from July) during the second grazing season (HIGH).

Slaughter performance	GO			HIGH		
	EARLY	LATE	HF	EARLY	LATE	HF
Age at slaughter (months)	22.1	22.4	24.7	20.5	20.4	24.4
Finishing days (indoors)	75	79	145	0	0	138
Finishing concentrate (kg)	367	387	720	471	427	1,051
Carcass weight (kg)	328	304	328	306	269	344
Carcass conformation	O=/O+	O=/O+	O-/O=	O=	O=/O+	O-/O=
Carcass fat	4-	3+	3+/4-	4-	3+	4-

DairyBeef500 – multi-species swards



James O'Sullivan farms 31ha near Union Hall in west Cork, running an early maturing heifer calf-to-beef system. Farm

type is predominantly dry and free draining, with some of the land running down onto the coast.

James tried multi-species swards for the first time this year on three paddocks, two of which are on very dry, free-draining soils and one on a slightly heavier clay soil. Soil was prepared by first spraying with glyphosate and tilling by ploughing, followed by a run of a disc harrow, before power harrowing and sowing. Three bags of 10-10-20 and an application of lime were spread at sowing. The crop established well, with the first grazing expected in early August.

Weed control could be an issue with this type of



sward. Multi-species swards contain chicory, plantain, red and white clover, along with ryegrasses. There are currently no post-emergent sprays available that chicory and plantain can survive. Dock control may be a problem therefore in the reseed. James may need to either spot spray docks with a knapsack sprayer or remove docks by hand as they appear.

DairyBeef500 campaign manager Alan Dillon was on July 20's The Beef Edge podcast to review the key messages from BEEF 2022 for dairy-beef farmers. He outlines what the new DairyBeef500 campaign hopes to achieve over the next five years. Tune in at:

https://bit.ly/DB_500.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Take care with machinery

August is harvest month with a lot of machinery movement on farms and on public roads, including trailers, balers and silage gear. Machinery movement brings danger, particularly to bystanders including children and older farmers. A vehicle travelling at a walking speed of 5km/hour travels at 1.4 metres per second. Being struck by a machine causes bystander deaths and injuries due to the impact force.

In August also, a lot of use is made of powered machines, so make sure moving parts are guarded. This applies particularly to machines used in a stationary position, like augers and slurry tanker drive shafts. Entanglement in a machine moving part leads to horrific injuries. Children are 'out and about' in August enjoying the summer before the return to school, so continued farm safety measures are necessary.

