

Store cattle finishing their last rotation on John Barry's farm near Nenagh.



Are you winter ready?

These simple steps will help assess your feed options this winter

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1 Update your fodder budget

The fodder budget tool in Pasturebase is a simple way to calculate your feed supply and demand. John Barry in Nenagh, Co Tipperary, was confident that he had enough silage for the winter in August. However, with the wet autumn, John fed bales of silage to cattle at grass to increase dry matter intake. This ate into his winter surplus.

“We usually have a five-month winter and, after amending my fodder budget, the silage will cover all the stock until the end of March, if housed at the end of October,” says John.

Fortunately, grass is available on the farm and John is following an autumn closing plan to ensure that

he also has grass next spring. The autumn herd and store cattle will be at grass until the end of October, and the spring herd will likely be housed in mid to late October.

John plans to sell store cattle in January; if feed is tight they may be sold earlier. The spring cull cows will be fed and sold in the coming month. He sowed redstart this year, which will provide an extra outdoor feed for yearlings.

“Thanks to the fodder budget I am aware of the potential feed challenge and, if necessary, I will feed ration or straights to reduce the silage required,” says John.

2 Testing silage

All farmers in the FutureBeef Programme test their silage. Proinnsias Creedon in Co Cork has taken three silage samples from the various layers of a number of open silage bales

from the same cut and mixed them together.

“I took the samples early in the week and placed them in an airtight bag,” says Proinnsias. “They were posted on the same day so that they would be fresh and not get stuck in the post over the weekend.”

For pit silage, take a representative sample from across the pit face. Imagine a ‘W’ pattern on the front and sample along that line. Include the top, middle and edges. Mix the samples. Repeat the process monthly as you move through the silage pit.

3 Using the results

Laboratory reports will show if the sample is poor, satisfactory or good. The main results are:

- **Dry matter digestibility (DMD):** The nutritional quality of the silage. Target >70%.

- **Crude protein:** Target >13%.
- **Dry matter:** Indicates intake potential and preservation. Target 25-35%.
- **pH:** Indicates the acidity of the silage and whether the preservation was successful. Target 4-4.7.

Proinnsias's first-cut silage tested 72% DMD at 12.9% crude protein, the second-cut silage is 73% DMD with 14% crude protein and the surplus bales are 65.4% DMD with 11% crude protein.

The finishing heifers (~480kg) will need an overall diet of 11-12% crude protein, while the store heifers (~400kg) and weanling heifers (280kg) will require a 13-14% crude protein diet.

"Based on the silage sample results I will feed the high protein silage to the weanlings and store heifers with 1kg of a 14% crude protein ration", says Proinnsias.

The finishing heifers will be fed the first-cut silage with 5.5kg of a 14% crude protein ration and, if necessary, can also be fed the lower protein surplus silage with 7kg of a 12% crude protein ration.

The finishing cattle will be built up gradually from 2kg ration by 0.5kg every three days to avoid digestive upsets. Table 1 shows how many kg of ration should be fed based on silage DMD results.

4 Value for money?

Ration costs vary depending on ration type, load sizes, collection versus delivery and purchasing power. A 12% high-energy ration is currently costing approximately €330 and a 15% ration €340 to €370.

The Teagasc on-line Relative Values of Feeds Calculator can help to determine what is good value, by using the retail price of barley, soya bean meal and distiller grains.

For example, if rolled barley is €260/t and soya is €525/t, wheat would be good value if less than €265/t and rolled oats would be good value if less than €221/t.

If feeding straights, remember to check that the overall diet is balanced for energy and protein, and includes adequate fibre and minerals.

5 Grazing catch crops

Kay O'Sullivan in Mourneabbey, Co Cork, has sown 1.6ha of Redstart on her organic farm this year. She plans to graze her finishing cattle on the crop and then the weanlings will move onto it. A catch crop can only make up 70% of the diet and the other

Table 1: Concentrate supplementation and silage quality

Silage quality	66 DMD	70 DMD	74 DMD
Finishing cattle target 1kg ADG	7kg	5.5kg	4kg
Store cattle target 0.6kg ADG	2kg	1.25kg	0.5kg
Weanlings target 0.6kg ADG	3kg	2kg	1kg

30% must come from hay or silage. Kay has the option to feed multi-species, red clover or grass silage while the crop is being grazed, and will await the silage sample results before deciding. Catch crops are low in minerals, therefore all stock will receive a mineral bolus containing iodine, copper, cobalt and selenium before grazing. The crop will be fed in strips daily, so that cattle can adapt to it gradually. "I will avoid feeding the crop during frosty weather," says Kay, "I'll also ensure that it is grazed before flowering in spring. We must prevent poaching so cattle will have access to three grass paddocks as a lie-back area, water will be available at all times."

6 Monitoring growth rates

Farmers in the FutureBeef Pro-

gramme will weigh their cattle two weeks after housing and again at turnout.

On some farms, the young stock and any finishing cattle will be weighed monthly to check that they are achieving their target daily gains. Weanlings and store cattle should gain 0.6kg/day over the winter period, while finishing stock should gain over 1.5kg/day on average.

7 Other considerations

Animal health (ie dosing, vaccinations), feed space, lying space and shed ventilation also play a key role in ensuring animals perform to their optimum.

Join the Teagasc/AHI autumn beef health walks to find out more, timetables outlined below.




Getting Winter Ready

Teagasc/ AHI Autumn Beef Health Walks 2023

Topics to be discussed include:
Housing Requirements; Winter Nutrition; Animal Health and Farm Safety

Wednesday, 4 October 2pm Tom Jackson, Quitrent, Kildorrery, Co. Cork P67 PE08	Friday, 6 October 11am Ciaran & Christina Condren, Gorey, Co. Wexford Y25 VH63
Tuesday, 10 October 11am Killian & Margaret O'Leary, Askeaton, Co. Limerick V94 48N1	Thursday, 12 October 2.30pm Richard Brennan, Holycross, Thurles, Co. Tipperary E41 FT04
Friday, 20 October 11am James Madigan, Ballyhale, Co. Kilkenny R95 W407	Tuesday, 24 October 11am Michael O'Donnell, Cappoquin, Co. Waterford P51 RR02
Thursday, 26 October 4pm Oliver O'Hara, Leckaun, Co. Leitrim F91 Y8P6	Friday, 27 October 2pm John Dunne, Tinnacrannagh House, Portarlinton, Co. Offaly R32 V127
Thursday, 2 November 2pm Proinnsias Creedon, Clondrohid, Macroom, Co. Cork P12 NX37	



For more info visit www.teagasc.ie/beefwalks