

Budgeting for spring feed requirements

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Across some parts of the country, particularly in the southern region, stock have eaten a lot more silage than expected for this stage of the winter. A combination of summer drought (which led to silage being fed outside from July to September), and an earlier than expected winter when heavy rain arrived in October has led to a large bank of the winter feed being consumed on some farms.

The springs of 2018 and even 2013 when fodder was imported to fill the deficit caused by a prolonged wet winter should still be in the back of people's minds when planning ahead. With fodder and meal prices at already much higher levels than five years ago, farmers should take stock of where they are at now and work out how much silage they will have available should a late spring occur (**Table 1**). Farmers have a number of options available to stretch out what fodder they have available

should they need to.

1. Purchase in silage, hay or straw. Suckler cows with calves at foot, growing weanlings or finishing cattle need a high-quality diet to perform. If purchasing silage, try and assess the quality. Some late-cut meadows (past mid June) will only deliver at best a maintenance feed and this will require supplementation to put weight on weanlings or to allow cows to milk. Stemmy, low-digestible silage is being advertised for €40-45 per bale online and represents poor value for money.
2. Straw and meal. For finishing cattle, moving them to a high concentrate diet while providing straw as a roughage source may prove an acceptable option for a short period of time until cattle are fit to kill. Straw seems to be in more plentiful supply with a number of ads online. While straw is

of poor quality in terms of feeding value, it may not be that much worse than some of the late hay and silage first cuts made in late June and July last year. While high meal prices will probably mean cattle won't cover their cost of feed for the last days of finishing, it will save silage for weanlings and cows, allow good levels of performance, and ensure they are finished quicker.

3. Sell stock. Mart prices are strong and the more risk-averse farmer may choose to sell some of their older cattle live rather than take on the risk of feeding and finishing in the shed. Beef prices have been rising for some time but meal is up roughly 30% on last year's prices also. Farmers need to do the sums.

Table 1: Fodder budget.

	A	B	C	
Animal type	Number of stock to be kept over winter	Number of months (include a four- to six-week reserve)	Pit silage needed, tonnes/ animal/month	Tonnes of silage needed – multiply (AxBxC)
Dairy cows			1.6	
Suckler cows			1.4	
0-1 year old			0.7	
1-2 years old			1.3	
2+ years old			1.3	
Total tonnes needed			D	
Total bales needed (tonnes multiplied by 1.25)			E	

DairyBeef 500 update

Ciaran Bartley farms 74ha of mixed quality land near Boher in Co. Limerick. A total of 160 dairy-bred calves, mainly Friesian with a small number of Angus, are purchased each spring and taken through to finish. Moving towards a younger age of slaughter has become a priority for Ciaran, with the majority of steers and heifers killed under 24 months of age. Targeting an earlier housing date in the autumn and introducing meal earlier in the second year allows the cattle to build fat

cover and meet carcass specification at a younger age. For Ciaran the benefit is threefold: it allows cash back into the system earlier in year; there is less meal and silage fed to cattle over the winter; and, it takes pressure off winter housing and slurry storage by having sheds vacated in early January instead of late March. These cattle that are killed earlier have a lighter carcass, typically from 280-310kg, but also consume lower levels of feed, which reduces costs significantly.

Date for the diary

The Teagasc DairyBeef 500 campaign will be running two DairyBeef conferences. The first is on January 19 in the Talbot Hotel in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. The second takes

place on January 26 in the Charleville Park Hotel in Charleville, Co. Cork. Both events start at 7.00pm.

HEALTH & SAFETY



Start the new year safely

Let's all make 2023 a safe and healthier year for everyone working and living on farms. Improving safety and health requires intention in advance of action. Review and update your risk assessment document and then take actions.

A total of 12 fatal farm workplace accidents were recorded in 2022 (provisional data). This is almost 50% of all workplace fatalities (26). Major causes associated with farm workplace fatalities were: farm vehicles and machinery 59% (7); falls from heights and falling objects 33% (4); and, slurry drowning 8% (1). Of the fatal farm workplace accidents in 2022, 59% (7) were persons aged 65 or older, 33% (4) were persons aged 55 to 64 years, and 8% (1) were in the 45 to 54 years old category.

In 2023, particular attention needs to be paid to the safety of 'senior' farmers. Family members can greatly assist such persons by discussing practical risk assessment. Also,



Update your risk assessment.

moving vehicles such as tractors, teleporters and ATVs pose a high risk to drivers and persons in close vicinity to them.

RESEARCH UPDATE



Liver fluke

Teagasc research looks at the risk of liver fluke and how to target them.

Infection of cattle with the liver fluke flatworm, *Fasciola hepatica*, can lead to chronic infections and reduced performance. The prevalence of infection in Ireland is generally high. Damp, poorly drained conditions provide an ideal habitat for the intermediate host, the mud snail, and the risk of fluke varies between regions, farms and from year to year depending on weather and ground conditions. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), in conjunction with Met Éireann, produces a forecast every year that predicts the risk of liver fluke disease throughout the country. The forecast for 2022-2023 was released in late November and predicts a high risk of liver fluke disease in the north west and along the western seaboard, low risk of disease for the eastern and southern seaboard and south Leinster, and moderate risk for the rest of the country. In addition to the forecast, additional information such as farm history, liver reports from the abattoir, post-mortem of fallen stock or laboratory tests, such as fluke faecal egg counts can provide farm-specific information of the risk of liver fluke disease.

The winter period, when cattle are housed, represents an opportunity to control liver fluke. Liver fluke can be classified as early immature



Different treatments target different fluke stages.

(under six weeks), immature (six to 10 weeks) or adult (>10 weeks). There are a number of different flukicides on the market and different products kill fluke of different stages. It is important to ensure that the product used is appropriate for the stage of fluke present. For example, if cattle are treated with a product that kills immature fluke at housing then they should receive a second treatment approximately eight weeks post housing to kill the early immature fluke that would have survived the first treatment. Products containing triclabendazole are the only products licenced to kill all stages of fluke. However, resistance to this flukicide has been reported in Ireland, so it is important to ensure the product used is effective. Discuss your fluke control strategy, including testing and treatments, with your vet or animal health advisor.