

BEEF

May 2023

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Key deadlines

Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme (SCEP)
Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS)

midnight on May 22, 2023.
midnight on May 29, 2023.



Date for the diary

On Tuesday May 23, Teagasc and Dawn Meats in collaboration with the Irish Farmers Journal and McDonalds, are delighted to welcome all farmers and stakeholders in the beef sector to the Newford Suckler Demonstration Farm Open Day. It is five years since the last major open day was

held on the Newford farm. The theme for this year's event is 'Meeting the challenges'. Topics covered on the day will include: system overview; breeding and genetics; sustainability practices; and, grassland management. This event has free admission, and all are welcome to attend.

Newford Suckler Open Day

Tues, 23 May | 2pm - 6pm

Athenry, Co. Galway



Making quality silage

It is difficult to predict next winter's concentrate prices. Beef farmers who have been growing or finishing cattle will need to offset the rising meal price per tonne (t) by improving the quality of silage they make this year, which will allow them to feed less meal per head, while still achieving target growth rates. For example, a farmer feeding weanlings 72% dry matter digestibility (DMD) grass silage instead of 67% DMD, could save 1kg of meal per head per day (1.0kg v 2.0kg meal per day) and still have the same daily gain. If this farmer was feeding 50 weanlings over 140 days that would mean they would save seven tonnes of ration, as outlined in **Table 1**. The biggest influence on whether you make a 72% DMD or a 67% DMD grass silage is the date that

the crop is cut. Essentially, once the sward of mostly leaf and stem material is kept to a minimum, the quality will remain high. This is usually the case up until the middle of May. From then on, quality starts to decrease as more and more stem develops. Every week that cutting is delayed, the quality decreases by 2.5-3.0 DMD units. If swards were not grazed this spring before they were closed, it is even more important to bring forward the cutting date. Lodging will have the biggest impact on reducing silage quality. If the target is plus 72% DMD silage you will need to watch the crop closely from May 20 onwards and have your contractor lined up. Silage crops that are not harvested until the early days of June are unlikely to be above 70% DMD.

Table 1: Silage quality variation impact on concentrates required.

Silage quality	Good 72% DMD	Average 67% DMD	Poor 62% DMD	Very poor 55% DMD
Store cattle on silage only Liveweight gain (kg/140-day winter)	102	83	55	21
Weanlings Concentrates required (kg/hd/day)	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.5
For 50 weanlings 140-day winter	7t	14t	21t	31.5t
Concentrate costs over winter at €400/t	€2,800	€5,600	€8,400	€12,600



HEALTH & SAFETY

Safety this breeding season

May is a very active farming month, particularly with machinery work, including spraying, silage harvesting, and fertiliser and slurry spreading. May is also one of the main breeding months on many farms. Health and Safety Authority (HSA) figures show that bulls were involved in over 16% of livestock-related deaths on Irish farms in the last 10 years. It is important that facilities for cattle handling are present, appropriate, well designed and maintained, and that tasks with animals are properly planned and organised. Many accidents with bulls take place in the open

field during the main mating season. Always keep the bull in your sight and plan a means of protection or an escape route. A tractor or other suitable farm vehicle (i.e., Jeep) can be useful to make sure there is a safe refuge available when you need to go into a field where a bull is running with the cows.

Remember: always seek help when carrying out tasks that involve bulls. Keep a mobile phone in your pocket so you can call for help if needed. Someone should be aware of where you are and when you expect to return.

12 STEPS TO REDUCING EMISSIONS

Over 12 months, the Teagasc advisory newsletters will outline actions farmers can take to reduce their emissions.

Step 6: Better grassland management

How does this reduce emissions?

Methane is one of the main greenhouse gases (GHGs) we need to reduce in Irish agriculture. Animals that are grazing grass (i.e., that have less silage in the diet) produce less methane, which is primarily belched from animals. Slurry stored and being applied to land also result in GHG emissions. A longer grazing season means shorter housing time, leading to less slurry being stored, and thus, less being applied to land. There is the additional benefit of improved animal performance. Improving animal performance reduces GHG emissions per 1kg of milk or meat. Every additional week at grass reduces GHG emissions by 1%.

What are the benefits?

Improving grassland management leads to increased grass in the diet and better animal performance. It is the most important contributor to improved farm profitability on livestock farms in Ireland. Every 1t of grass dry matter utilised on a beef farm is worth €105.

What action should I take?

1. Walk your farm weekly.
2. Measure grass.
3. Use PastureBase Ireland.
4. Improve infrastructure, e.g., fencing, access points, and water supply.
5. Avoid poaching.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Sub-fertile bulls

DAVID KENNY of the Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Grange, Co. Meath reports on some of the factors affecting the fertility of bulls.

Irish statistics suggest that the main reasons for the culling of natural service breeding bulls in beef herds were: injury (23.2%); locomotory issues (21.9%); and, infertility *per se* (7.2%). Infertility is undoubtedly underestimated given that many sterile bulls are now being identified at an earlier stage following the recent adoption of bull breeding soundness evaluations (BBSEs). Sub-fertility is estimated to affect 20-25% of bulls. It may be caused directly by low libido, sperm defects, or indirectly by physical factors affecting bull mobility or mating ability. Recent Teagasc research has shown that while high-concentrate diets from birth right through to 17 months old, had no discernible effect on any aspect of sperm production, quality, or fertility measured, research into long-term effects on bull longevity is warranted. The potential acute and chronic effects of such acidotic diets on the incidence of inflammatory conditions like laminitis and ultimately on lifetime hoof and joint health, need to be established and will be the focus of a new Teagasc-led project commencing later this year.



Sterile bulls are now being identified earlier with BBSEs.

In a separate study Teagasc, together with University College Dublin (UCD) and the University of Limerick (UL), have conducted research into various aspects of bull fertility as part of a large Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)-funded project. The work investigated optimising the rearing management of young bulls, relating differences in the DNA profile of young bulls with age at sexual development and sperm quality, as well as the biochemical differences in the sperm of mature bulls ranked as either high or low fertility. The results of the project have yielded much new information on the main factors affecting the fertility of bulls, as well as identifying some key biomarkers for the early identification of better fertility and the culling of sub-fertile animals. Such information will be harnessed within the national genomically-assisted cattle breeding programmes for the long-term improvement of bull fertility in Ireland.

