Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

BEEF

July 2024

What is your fodder situation?

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Now is the time to plan for your winter fodder needs.

By the time we get to the end of this month, most if not all first- and second-cut silage should be in the yard, after what has been a long winter, a difficult spring, and poor growth in June. The ability to take out surplus grass for silage has been minimal. With very little reserve of forage on farms from last spring, it is timely to sit down this month and complete a fodder budget with your advisor for the coming winter. It is best to act earlier rather than later. Now is the time to plan and act on your winter feed options. If last winter/spring signals what climate change can bring, then we need to reassess our

GREATER THAN A 20% fodder deficit may mean the purchase of extra forage or feeding extra meal over the winter.

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winter feed requirements and aim to have one to two months of surplus feed in reserve (**Table 1**). This may take several years to achieve but we need to at least make a start, particularly on the heavier stocked farms.

Step 1: Assess what fodder you have available

Measure all pits of silage – length X breadth X average settled height – to calculate the volume in the silage pits in m^3. As a rough guide to convert to tonnes of silage, multiply the volume by 0.77. For example, $100m^3$ = 77 tonnes of fresh silage at 20% dry matter (DM). If the silage is very wet (18% DM) multiply by 0.81, and if the silage is dry (25% DM), multiply by 0.68.

Step 2: Calculate your winter feed requirement (use Table 1 below)

Step 3: Is there a surplus or deficit?

With a bit of luck most farms will have adequate fodder on hand to cover for a 'normal' winter, but it would be a bonus if a surplus to cover an extra one to two months was on hand. Farms currently showing a deficit will have to move to step 4.

Start by calculating your winter feed requirement.

Step 4: Decide on your options

The level of the deficit will vary from farm to farm and this will determine what options are available to you. Less than a 20% deficit and you may look to close some ground for a late second or third cut. Cutting winter demand by selling empty cows or finishing some stock off grass before housing may solve the issue, and will be attractive if store/beef prices remain buoyant.

Greater than a 20% deficit may mean the purchase of extra forage or feeding extra meal over the winter to stretch available feed, but this will impact on cash flow.

A combination of all the options may be needed. The important thing is to know where you stand and then you can react in an informed way.

Table 1: Feed requirements for different types of animal.

Animal type	Pit silage (t) needed per month	Bales (4x4) needed per month
Dairy cow	1.6	1.8
Suckler cow	1.4	1.6
In-calf heifer	1.3	1.4
Weanling	0.7	0.8
Store cattle	1.3	1.4

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Avoid long working hours

July is a particularly busy month on farms, with long hours of hard and high-risk work, usually involving tractors and machinery. Farmers and contractors must never underestimate the impact of excessively long working hours. Long hours can lead to long-term embedded fatigue and mistakes that would not otherwise happen. Always seek help and manage workload. With children at home from school, their safety also needs special attention.

Upcoming events in July

A major Teagasc Open Day is planned for Tuesday, July 16, at the Teagasc Environment, Soils and Land Use Research Centre, Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford. For further information, see: https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/news/2024/johnstown-castle-open-day.php.

Suckler events

We also have two Future Beef suckler events in July. The first is on Friday, July 12, at the Organic Farm of Ken Gill in Clonbullogue, Edenderry, Co. Offaly, R45 HT67. This starts at 6.30pm. The second will take place on the farm of Eamon and Donnchadh McCarthy on Friday, July 26, in Carrigeen, Glendine, Youghal, Co. Waterford, P36 DT18. Start time is 3.00pm.

More information can be found on these events by visiting: https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/national-events/?month=07&year=2024&search=month.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Dietary oil to reduce methane

STUART KIRWAN, NEAL FOLLIARD and EMILY ROSKAM report on Teagasc Grange research that examined suppressing methane production with dietary oil.

In Ireland, agriculture accounts for ~34% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Enteric methane, a potent GHG, accounts for 65% of these agricultural emissions. Enteric methane is produced as a result of the fermentation of feed in the rumen, predominantly from cattle and sheep. Under EU legislation, Ireland has committed to reduce agricultural GHG emissions by 25% by 2030. Therefore, reducing the quantity of methane emitted by livestock will be essential to achieving this target. Dietary supplements such as 3-NOP and calcium peroxide-based compounds have received a lot of attention recently for their efficacy in reducing methane production. However, these products are two to three years from being licensed for beef production within the EU. Recent studies in Teagasc Grange examined the effectiveness of supplementing beef cattle with linseed oil and rapeseed oil, offered twice daily mixed into concentrate feed, as a methane inhibitor. Supplementing linseed oil at 4% of dry matter intake (DMI) reduced methane production by 19% without any negative effect on DMI, digestibility or growth rate. Supplementing rapeseed oil and cold-pressed rapeseed cake at 2.5% and 14.5% of DMI, respectively, with both diets balanced for oil content, had no negative effect on DMI, digestibility or performance, and reduced methane production by 8%. While these products effectively reduced methane production, their use in beef diets may be cost prohibitive. However, further research is warranted to evaluate any possible synergistic benefits of supplementing oils in tandem with other methane-mitigating compounds.

Enteric methane accounts for 65% of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions.

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