Teagasc LIFE BEEF CARBON Newsletter 4

September 2018

1ST INTERNATIONAL FARMER DISCUSSION GROUP MEETING

Teagasc BEEF 2018

The adoption of key technologies in relation to animal genetics, grassland management and herd health are the key to increasing the profitability of beef production in Ireland. This was the message from Director of Teagasc, Professor Gerry Boyle speaking at the BEEF2018 Open Day in Teagasc Grange, today, Tuesday 26th of June. Professor Boyle said: "The beef sector faces significant challenges arising from Brexit, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and climate change. However, key technologies, which are under the farmer's control, can help farmers face these challenges and can have a large influence on farm profit."

At the better beef village, key performance indicators were highlighted. These include achieving 0.95 calves weaned per cow per year, age of first calving of 24 months, a 6-week calving rate of 80% and achieving an average daily weight gain of 1.25 kilograms to weaning, in combination with excellent grazing management. The practices highlighted are key to improving farm profitability and reducing carbon footprint.

The third phase of the Better Beef farms was presented and the actions they are implementing as part of LIFE BEEF CARBON. The soil health challenge is targeting N emissions by improving pH and soils P and K status. James Flaherty farms 41 ha near Castleisland, Co. Kerry and runs a suckler calf-to-weanling and dairy calf-to-beef enterprise. Approximately 50% of the total land area is soil Index 1 or 2 for P and K, and 30 to 40% of the farm has a lime requirement of 10 to 18 tonnes/ha. Lime will be applied over a number of years at a rate of 5 t/ha/annum.

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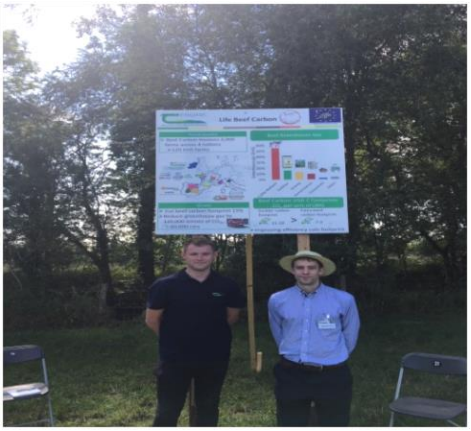
18-6-12 and 10-10-20 for grazing ground, whereas for silage ground, fertilisers such as 0-7-30 or cattle slurry will supply the P and K required, with Urea applied to supply the N requirement. Soil analysis will be carried out on an annual basis on this low-index land to monitor performance.

Clover will also be tested on farms to improve grass production and reduce carbon emissions. Tommy Holmes farms 18 ha near Ballina, Co. Mayo in a suckler calf-to-finishing system. Over the past number of years Tommy has placed greater emphasis on soil pH along with P and K indexes. The farm grew 15.3 t grass DM/ha in 2016 and Tommy wants to grow and utilise even more grass going forward. Research has shown that white clover has the ability to fix N from the air and can supply 50 to 200 kg N/ha annually. Tommy is eager for clover to be included in all his swards to increase herbage production, palatability and quality.

The substantial potential from increasing grass production and utilisation was highlighted in the GRASS10 village. Current grass utilisation on beef farms nationally is 5 tonnes of Dry matter per hectare. This can be easily increased to 10 t DM/ha by improving grazing farm infrastructure; correcting soil fertility, applying best grazing management practices and reseeding poor performing paddocks. Source: Teagasc and Better Beef Programme

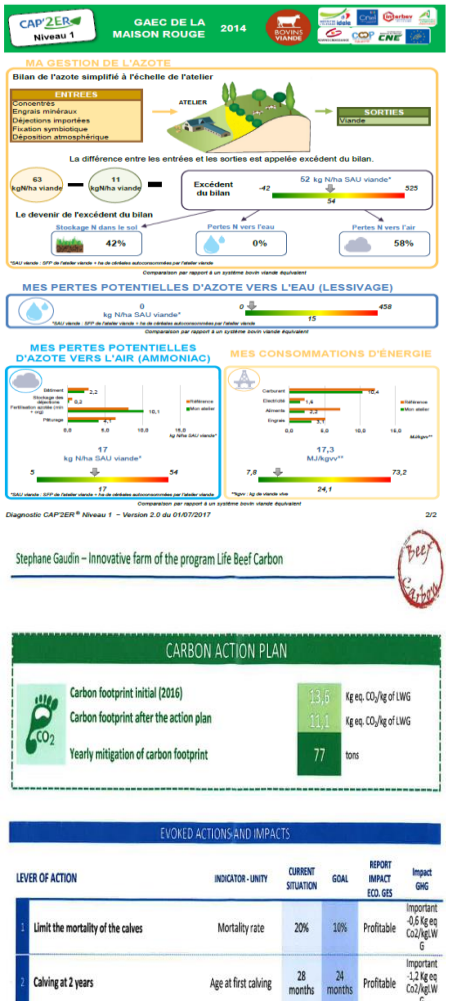


To increase soil P and K levels, James will focus on applying fertilisers such as

1st International Farmer Network

The first international meeting of innovative farmers of the LIFE BEEF CARBON project took place on 9, 10 and 11 September in Nantes and Rennes (France). During this meeting a total of 50 technicians and innovative breeders from France, Ireland, Italy and Spain met to share their experience and thoughts related to the project and the implementation of the carbon mitigation plans.

Suckler to weaning and suckler to beef innovative farms were visited during the network. Stephane Gaudin from the Pays de La Loire region of France presented his 77 ha suckler to weaning on the opening day. He outlined the positive contributions of his mixed farming enterprise and showed how his carbon action plan has reduced his footprint from 13.6 to 11.1 kg of CO_2 equivalent per kg of LWG.



Stephane aims to improve the sustainability of his farm by verifying the health of the calves after birth and checking the heifers before and after calving.

The second day featured a visit to an agricultural school in Rennes. The school teaches students about animal husbandry and crop production. The schools suckler to beef farm is used to provide practical beef courses. It is a mixed beef system with grassland and tillage. Blonde D'Acquitane is the cattle breed used on the herd. Similar to Stephane, the Rennes farm manager outlined how he aims to reduce carbon by improving productivity. The initial results of this farm and the partner nation's innovative farms were presented and discussed at the SPACE event.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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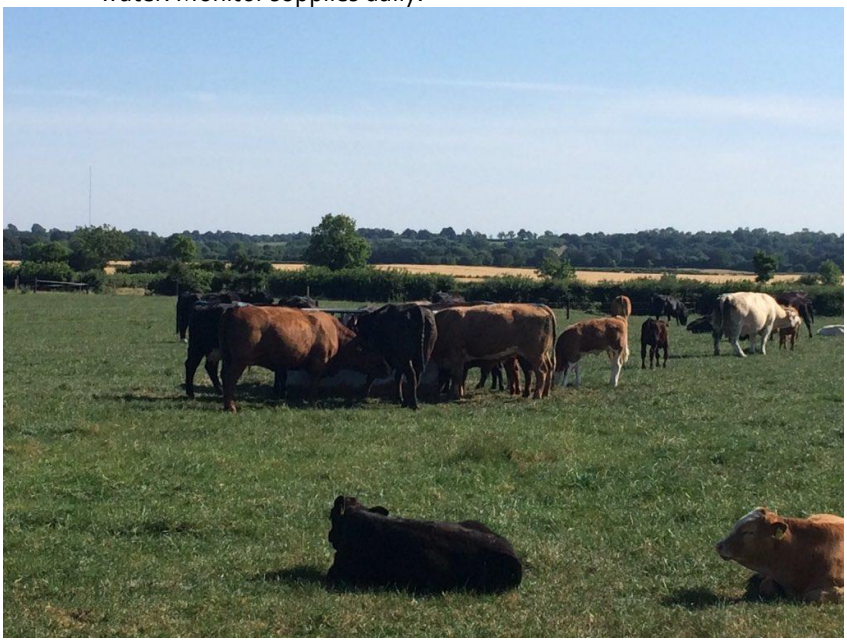
Dealing with prolonged drought

The unusually long dry period, after a difficult spring, has made farming conditions exceptionally challenging in many parts of the country. The following Teagasc advice will assist in coping with the drought conditions.

Managing livestock

- Hold rotation length at 30 days to maintain a level of grass in the diet. It is crucial that grass supply on farms is "stretched" to keep grass in the diet of the animal.
- Every farm should be grazing to 4cm. Avoid topping as its wasting feed and will also inhibit regrowth.
- Reduce demand by grazing second cut silage ground. Graze with a strip wire and back fence to extend the rotation and supplement the feed deficit. On out-farms where grass is closed for silage, either graze or harvest as silage.
- Where re-growths are poor or non-existent, stop spreading fertiliser. Have fertiliser bought for spreading as soon as rain comes (CAN based fertilisers).
- Order concentrate feeds well in advance of needing supplies as delivery may be slowed due to demand.
- Ensure stock always have access to a clean supply of water. Monitor supplies daily.



Suckler cows and calves

- Wean autumn born calves and restrict cows.
- Spring born calves should be weaned when they reach a minimum weight of 250 kg. These can be supplemented with ration. Levels will depend on the level of grass covers available.
- Lighter weanlings should be forward creep grazed and supplemented where it is possible to do so, and where the breeding season is over spring calvers can be restricted.
- Grass silage or hay should be used to supplement cows at grass to ensure no more than 25% of the grazing area is grazed per week.
- Where winter fodder supplies are significantly below expected levels needed, meal supplementation will have to be given.
- Unproductive cows (not in calf, late calvers, poor performers) should be culled to reduce demand.

Store and finishing cattle

- Supplement yearlings and store cattle with grass silage or hay to maintain a 28-30 day rotation. If necessary supplement with concentrates to reduce overall forage levels used per week.
- Heavier stock close to finish can be fed on ad-lib diets of concentrates. It is essential to build up concentrate levels slowly (over three weeks). Always feed at least 10-15% long roughage and ensure there is always a supply of clean water available

Source: Teagasc