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Planning for higher output

Teagasc adviser **Gordon Peppard** profiles two of the participating farmers in the Green Acres Calf to Beef programme



BASED outside Tuls, Co Roscommon, Christy Dowd farms 105 acres of grassland, which is quite fragmented with four separate blocks of land. The home block of 70ac of owned and leased lands is well set out with a good roadway and paddock layout. The other blocks of lands are mainly cut for silage or hay, in addition to being used for grazing in the autumn. Christy previously operated a dairy farm. However, he switched systems and is currently running a herd of 40 suckler cows and followers for the last number of years. Christy, along with his Teagasc advisor Ger Cregg, identified the need to increase output on his farm and in the spring of 2015 he decided to start rearing Angus and Hereford heifer calves. He currently has 52 calves reared this year. Christy plans to rear and finish approximately 60 heifers every year. These will predominantly be Angus/ Hereford heifers but there may also be a few reared and finished as bullocks.

Spring 2015
With no designated calf rearing shed on the farm, Christy converted on old hay barn into an area to house his calves. The calves were divided into two separate groups and Christy used a Volac automated calf feeder to rear the calves. The feeder worked very well for Christy in that calves were consistently fed the same amount and concentration at all times and as the feeder has a 64-day programme with calves gradually weaned off. A few of the calves got pneumonia but Christy was able to keep all calves alive with veterinary assistance and treatments. However, the sick animals can now be easily identified as they are slightly behind the others. Healthy calves thrived very well with the best calves weighed 125kgs at turnout to grass. Pneumonia can be a major problem in young stock and often ventilation is an area that needs to be addressed in calf houses. This is an area that Christy has identified for improving for next year as this could have been one of the main causes of the pneumonia problem. A good vaccination programme will also be put in place to try and contain the issue next year.

Grassland management
Christy has a very good paddock layout on the home block of land. He has been grass measuring for the last number of years with a plate meter and recording his results on the Pasture Base system. This system gives a very good report on the amount of grass on the farm at any time and from this information, good management decisions can be made, such as removing excess grass as baled silage or if grass is in deficit, helping make a decision on when and where

FARM FACTS

- Farming outside Tuls, Co Roscommon
- 105 acres of grassland in four blocks
- Rearing 52 Angus/Hereford heifer calves
- First year in dairy calf to beef system
- 40 Suckler cows and followers



TAKING STOCK: Christy Dowd is rearing 52 Angus and Hereford heifer calves

to spread fertiliser, slow up the rotation and so on. The main aims of the grass measuring system is to identify the amount of grass in each paddock so that you can start grazing paddocks when they are 10cm high and to move stock out of the paddocks when they are grazed down to 4cm high. Paddocks should ideally be a size that a group of animals can get in and out of it in three to four days and that the new regrowth is not affected. From mid-April to August it is recommended that each grazing group has six to seven paddocks creating a

21 day rotation and a simple rule can then apply - with grass to be grown in three weeks and eaten in three days. Christy has become very good at grazing management and he consistently can get paddocks grazed down to 4cm. This allows top quality grass to be grown from the base of the grass plant. One of the main aims for Christy in joining the programme was to increase output on the farm as he has realised that output is the main driver of profit. The programme will draw up a three-year farm plan to try help Christy streamline his system, produce more beef from the same amount of grassland without drastically increasing costs. One of the reasons for purchasing Angus and Hereford heifers was that, animal housing for a second winter would be very tight and Christy plans to have the heifers sold from grass at 20 months to avoid having to re-house them again.

GREEN ACRES AT A GLANCE

THE Teagasc Green Acres Dairy Calf to Beef programme aims to demonstrate best practice on the rearing and finishing of purchased dairy calves through to beef (steers/heifers/bulls) on a whole-farm basis. Green Acres aims to improve the net margin on each of the participating farms over the course of the programme. The project is also providing technical support and training to the staff of the commercial stakeholders to the programme - Liffey Mills, Drummonds, Volac, MSD Animal Health and Grassland Agro. Two of the 10 participating farms will be profiled each month in the *Farming Independent*. These reports will give an outline of the holding, the farmer's goals and progress as the programme unfolds.

Healthy calves thrived very well with the best weighing 125kgs at turnout to grass

Make sure your winter fodder sums add up

Gordon Peppard

NOW IS an ideal time to assess your fodder stocks for the winter. The first step is a feed demand calculation on winter fodder requirements. It is also advisable to add 10pc extra for factors such as bad weather resulting in early housing or late turn out to grass in the Spring. The example given is for a farmer with 40 suckler cows keeping all their followers, eight replacement heifers and 50 calf to beef animals. In

this case, 712t of silage would be required for a five-month winter with a 10pc buffer. Next, calculate your feed supply. In this case, 270t of first cut silage is already in the pit - 70 silage bales in the yard are the equivalent to approximately 63t of pit silage. Twenty five acres have been left out for second cut silage with an expected yield of 7t/ac, giving another 175t. This means demand is 712t and current supply is 508t. There is potentially a shortfall of 204t of pit silage or 224 bales of silage.

The main aim is to take action now and the options include:

- Reduce feed demand, by offloading stock. Sell cull/empty cows (scan early), sell some weanlings in the autumn.
- Feed some meal to weanlings over the winter.
- Maximise grass growth by applying fertiliser and removing surplus grass as bales.
- Buy a standing crop of silage or buy silage bales.
- Buy alternative forages like maize silage, whole crop

silage or fodder beet. ● Grow forage crop if suitable. Once you have at least 50-60pc of your winter silage requirements you have options. Cost is important but other factors also need to be considered, including the risk of poor yields and quality, the need for storage and handling facilities, the cost of balancing for protein and minerals, cash flow implications and feeding space requirements. Consider the options carefully and don't panic buy.

Calculate feed demand					
Animal type	No. of stock	Feeding months	Pit silage per month (tonnes)	Total (tonnes)	
Suckler cow	40	5	1.4	280	
Weanling	90	5	0.7	315	
In calf heifer /Store	8	5	1.3	52	
Total				647	
Plus 10%				712	

Feed type	Acres (ton/acre)	Total yield	Yield(ton) factor	Multiple (tonnes)	Total
First cut	30	9	270	1	270
Second cut	25	7	175	1	175
Bales			70	0.9	63
Total					508



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Streamlining farm systems

Gordon Peppard

FARMING on the Meath-Westmeath border, David Drum rears Friesian bull calves. All animals are left entire and are finished as bulls from 16 to 22 months of age. David also runs a herd of 70 spring calving suckler cows with all progeny kept to finish. There is also a tillage enterprise on the farm where cereals, fodder beet and maize are grown. All grain is retained on the farm and fed to finishing animals.

2015 calves
This spring, 165 Friesian bull calves were reared on the farm. The calves were reared in groups of 27 with teat feeders used initially to feed calves twice per day, they were then cut back to once a day after four weeks. Meal, straw and fresh water were offered ad lib at all times to ensure good rumen development. All calves were sourced in the south of the country by an agent and were bought in over a four week period. The calves are now weaned and are all at grass since mid-June. They are getting over 1kg of a homemade ration once a day having been eating close to 2.5kg while indoors.

Friesian yearling bulls
170 Friesian yearling bulls were turned out to grass earlier this spring for two months grazing, the strongest 130 have now been housed for finishing since the first of June. They will be built up to an ad lib meal diet plus grass silage in order to finish them over the next 100 to 120 days. The 40 lightest bulls will remain at grass for the next six to eight weeks when they will be housed and finished around Christmas. Due to the high level of

to be handled and facilities available, especially where calves are grazing on rented ground. They will then receive an ivermectin pour on three weeks after housing. David is going to do regular faecal sampling of each group of stock throughout the grazing season to monitor the presence of worms and fluke. Sampling completed to date has shown very low levels of parasitic eggs present. The farm is in an area of high Molybdenum and this is causing a problem in relation to copper being tied up and causing a deficiency in the animals. To counteract this, all animals are given a Copper bolus when they are going to grass and again later in the season, extra copper is also required in the minerals fed in the meal mix.

stock grazing earlier in the year, David has made very little silage to date. Now that most of the Friesian bulls have been housed for finishing, grazing pressure on the farm has greatly been reduced and a large section of the farm can now be taken out for silage. A fodder budget will be undertaken on the farm to assess if enough silage is available for the winter. If silage is in short supply then, action can be taken early. On grazing ground, in order to prevent grass quality from deteriorating, topping will be undertaken after each grazing and fertiliser will be applied especially on newly reseeded ground.

Targets
With suckler cows producing bulls and heifers for finishing, tillage, grain storage, drying and rolling, and a calf to beef system on the farm, there is quite a lot going on in David's farm. A three year farm plan will be drawn up for David which will try to streamline



FEEDING: David Drum's calves are now weaned and are all at grass since mid-June. They are getting over 1kg of a homemade ration once a day having been eating close to 2.5kg while indoors.

FARM FACTS

- Livestock and tillage farm outside Athboy, Co Meath
- Rearing 165 Friesian bull calves
- Own grain stored and fed on farm
- Friesian bulls housed for finishing from 16 to 22 months
- 70 Suckler cows and followers kept to finish



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