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# Ambitious targets

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



**B**ASED in Lisdowney, Co Kilkenny, Pat Bowden and his family farm 100 hectares of grassland in three separate blocks. Having taken over the land in recent years, some ground needs development work in terms of drainage, cleaning back sides of field boundaries and reseeded. Pat will work on this over the next few years. Pat currently has 72 calves bought in, these are mainly Friesian bull calves which will be castrated at six months of age. There are also 35 suckler cows and their calves on the farm. A Limousin bull is currently running with these cows. Pat previously sold some of the Friesian store bullocks at 22 months of age, but will now look at the option of finishing all stock. Shed space will be the main obstacle to Pat in trying to increase stocking rate and output on the farm over the next couple of years.

**Soil fertility**  
Pat's entire farm was soil sampled in early February before any slurry or fertiliser

was applied. On analysing the results it was discovered that the levels of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) were quite low on the farm, with P levels particularly poor. Lime levels were also low, with fields requiring between two and five tonnes per acre. To grow enough quality grass, the lime first needs correcting and then the P and K levels. Following consultation with local Teagasc advisor, Terry Carroll it was decided to spread two tonnes of lime per acre on 50ac. To spread the cost and workload of this, another 100 tonnes will be spread at the end of the year or next spring, depending on weather. Pat may apply a product like 0/7/30 or 0/10/20 at the back end of the year or early next spring to boost P and K levels. It is planned to spread this soil fertility build up over a couple of years so that substantial costs are not all incurred in the one year.

**2015 calves**  
Some 72 calves were reared this spring. These calves were born between mid-January and mid-March.

The main group of 54 are at grass in a sheltered paddock close to the yard. They are receiving 1kg of meal per day. They were treated with an ivermectin-based pour on, three weeks after turnout to control worms and lice. Pat intends to take dung samples randomly from five of these calves in the next week to see what worm burden is on the calves to establish if another treatment is required or not.

**Dung samples**  
The procedure for taking dung samples is to obtain at least 10 grammes of fresh dung from around 10pc of the group. Therefore Pat will need five to six individual samples from his group of 54 calves. The five samples should be put in five individual containers,

**FARM FACTS**

- Farming 100ha near Lisdowney, Co Kilkenny.
- Rearing 72 Friesian bull calves.
- Finishing as bullocks between 26 to 30 months.
- 35 Spring calving Suckler Cows and followers.
- Soil fertility levels are low.



**TAKING STOCK:** Pat Bowden plans to increase the stocking rate on his Kilkenny farm

ideally with a screw cap, with the animal tag number for identification purposes. Then put the five samples inside a sealed bag so that it does not burst in the post. Ensure to include your name, address and herd number along with the age of animals that dung samples are taken from when sending to your local veterinary lab or vet.

**Yearling stock**  
The yearlings are currently grazing in three groups. The main group of 60 bullocks, 20 yearling heifers from the suckler herd and 12 heifers running with an Angus bull to provide replacements for the suckler herd. They have been out at grass since the first week of April. The Friesian bullocks were weighed on March 14 before they went to grass and averaged 285kgs. They will be weighed again in the next two weeks.

**Grassland**  
Pat had always operated a set stocking system, where a group of animals were left on the one area for the entire grazing season. To

make better use of grass and improve growth rates, a rotational grazing system has been devised and Pat is splitting up fields with a wire fence. This will be completed on the out farm first and Pat can then concentrate on the home farm next. These smaller fields can then be grazed off in three to four days and animals regularly moved to fresh grass. Due to strong growth, there is currently surplus grass on the farm. As fields are grazed they will be topped to remove stemmy grass and improve the quality of the regrowth.

**Finishing bullocks**  
Twenty-one Friesian bullocks are currently being finished on good quality leafy grass. They are receiving 5kgs of meal and will be finished in the next month at 28 months. These animals were also weighed in mid-March and averaged 546kgs. If they average one kilo of gain between grass and meal over the past four and a half months, they should have an average weight at slaughter of around 680kgs.

## 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.

# Strategies for parasite control in young animals

**Gordon Peppard**  
ONE OF the main reasons for the lack of thrive in young cattle at grass is due to infection by parasites. The main parasites are gut (stomach) worms, lungworms (hoose), liver fluke and rumen fluke. In young stock severe infection can reduce growth rates by up to 30pc. This will make it very difficult to achieve target weights for age for both beef animals and replacement heifers. There are three key areas

to controlling parasites in young animals.

**1 Identify the risk**  
Young stock particularly artificially reared calves at grass for the first time are most at risk of infection as they are eating reasonable amounts of grass and have very little immunity developed. But other grazing cattle exposed to worms may also suffer production losses. Permanent grassland grazed by livestock in the previous couple of months poses a very high risk of

infection. Young animals should ideally graze, new reseeds, after silage has been cut or grass that has had no stock for greater than six months. Worm build up on grass over the grazing season and infective stages generally peak from mid- summer onwards.

**2 Treat correctly**  
Monitoring of animals is a critical strategy that can be used. Regular weighing to monitor average daily

gains and growth rates is vital. Ideally use a scales but alternatives such as weight bands can be used as a guideline. A weight gain of 0.7kgs plus per day indicates a very low risk from parasites. Undertake to regularly dung sample to determine the number of worm eggs present. Talk to your vet or local veterinary laboratory on this method.

**3 Avoid resistance**  
Use products correctly, avoid under dosing animals, weigh cattle if possible to get

to provide cover for the first couple of months at grass to minimise pasture contamination. Different product types have different lengths of suppression depending on whether you are using white drenches, yellow/clear drenches, avermectins or boluses. Check with your vet to establish the period of cover that you have.

**Strategic use of wormers (anthelmintics)**  
Treatments are generally focused on young stock

correct weigh. Check dosing equipment to ensure correct amount is applied. Follow the instructions on the label. Good control can be achieved by using anthelmintics responsibly, focusing on treating individuals or groups at appropriate times and recognising that animals can thrive without frequent treatments. In all cases it is advisable to discuss a control strategy with your own vet as no two farms are the same.



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# Adding a tillage dimension

**Gordon Peppard**  
BEN SWEENEY and his family rear and finish bulls, bullocks and heifers on their farm just outside of Enfield, Co Meath. There is also a tillage enterprise on the farm. Triticale was planted this spring, with the intention to whole crop it as silage in the autumn for winter feeding. Each year Ben rears and finishes approximately 70 Angus/Hereford heifers and 100 Friesian bull calves. Calves are bought from a few different sources, some purchased locally from a couple of farmers and others purchased through a cattle agent who sources them predominately in the south of the country. There are also 25 spring calving suckler cows and their calves on the farm and another 10 heifers running with an Angus bull to be brought into the herd as replacements. Ben also buys in 40 continental type bull and heifer weanlings in October to finish.

**2015 Calves**  
This spring 170 calves were reared on the farm. Some calves were reared on a Volac feeder and some with the teat feeders. The first batch of calves reared on the feeder were 47 Friesian bull calves, these are now weaned and are at grass since the end of May, they are getting 1kg of a 16pc crude protein ration once a day having been on a 18pc ration while indoors. These calves are on a small area of grass close to the house for ease of management in terms of watching them for sickness, shelter and for feeding. They will be moved regularly to fresh grass. The other 100 calves were reared on teat feeders and have all been weaned within the last fortnight. A second batch of 21 calves was put on the feeder around the beginning of June, these are mainly Angus heifers, they have access to ad lib straw and calf ration.

**Finishing bulls**  
Forty-seven Friesian bulls were killed out of the shed in the third week of June, these bulls were 18-20 months of age. They have been on an ad lib bull finishing ration plus straw

since the end of February. Their average weight was 310kg at slaughter and 75pc of them killing out as Os. These bulls have consumed 1.8 to 2t of meal over their lifetime.

**Yearling bulls**  
There are 107 Friesian bulls aged 15-18 months currently at grass for the last two months in two separate groups. The heaviest 35 will be housed in the next week and they will be built up to an ad lib diet plus straw in order to finish them over the next 90 to 100 days. The remaining 72 animals will be left at grass until early September when they will be housed for finishing with a target date for slaughter before Christmas. When building up to ad lib meal, feeding management is very important. Ensure a constant supply of fresh clean drinking water, access to a roughage source and introduce concentrates slowly. It is recommended to build up over a three-week period. Start at 3kgs per day and add 1.5kg meal every three to four days until you reach ad lib. The table below is a suggested program for build-up to ad lib meal feeding.

**Finishing heifers**  
Ben currently has 43 heifers aged 24-26 months at grass. Some are fit for slaughter and will be slaughtered immediately. The next best 20 animals will be separated and fed 5kg of meal at grass for the next 60 to 70 days. The remainder will be slaughtered before Christmas.

**Finishing bullocks**  
Up to this week, 24-26 month old bullocks had been at grass since April, they have now been brought back to a small paddock beside the yard. They will have free access to ad lib meal in the adjoining shed for the next 80 days, and will be slaughtered before they are 30 months old. Meal will be built up slowly, starting with 2-3 kg and rising to ad lib over three weeks. Ben is looking closely at this steer finishing system and is strongly considering not castrating any bulls this year and leaving them as bulls until slaughter. It would help simplify his system as the bullocks



**WINTER FEEDING:** Ben Sweeney planted Triticale this spring and intends to harvest it as silage for winter feeding

are another group of animals to deal with on the farm. This group is also on the farm for an extra 10 to 12 months versus the bull system.

**FARM FACTS**

- Rearing 70 Angus/Hereford heifer calves and 100 Friesian bull calves.
- Tillage consisting of spring barley and triticale for whole cropping.
- Heifers finished off of grass at approx. 26 months.
- Friesian bulls housed for finishing at 18 to 20 months.
- 25 Spring calving Suckler cows and followers.
- Changing from set stocking to paddock grazing system.

Suggested Programme for Build-up to Ad Lib Meal Feeding			
Day	Concentrate (kgs)	Roughage Available	Feeding Routine (per day)
1	3	Ad lib	Feed once
5	4.5	Ad lib	Feed twice
9	6	Ad lib	Feed three times
13	7.5	Ad lib	Feed three times
17	9	Ad lib	Feed three times
21	10.5	Ad lib	Feed three times
24	Ad lib	10pc of dry matter intake	Feed ad lib