Teagasc
Advisory
Newsletter

BEEF

November 2020

Edited by
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Teagasc Virtual Beef Conference

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Teagasc Beef Conference 2020 will take place online over three evenings from Tuesday, December 1 to Thursday, December 3 at 8.00pm. More details will be made available closer to the time from your local Teagasc advisor.

The Teagasc Beef Conference takes place online this year.

Closing up paddocks until spring

About two-thirds of the grass grazed in spring (February/March) is grass that grew during October/early November. Therefore, it is essential that the fields/paddocks closed during October are not grazed in November and stay closed until spring. What is grazed now won't be available in the spring. Remember, every day the animal is at grass next spring is worth about €2/LU/day.

Autumn grass is worth a lot less. The priority now is to close the farm. Every one-week delay in closing will cost your farm 100kg of grass DM/ha in spring. The target is to have a minimum of 50% of the farm closed by November 1. Block grazing and back fencing are useful tools to help get the grazing job completed. Using a strip wire and moving animals once a day will improve the level of grass utilised and achieve greater clean out of these paddocks.

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Drafting dairy-bred steers off grass

Farming in Myshall, Co. Carlow, Shane Cranny operates a system where autumn-born calves are purchased and carried to beef as steers at 22-24 months of age (**Table 1**). The ability to move animals to slaughter before housing was a key driver in the decision to enter this system and a mixture of Friesian, Hereford and Fleckvieh (Simmental) steers were targeted for slaughter this autumn.

Drafting began on September 10, when nine animals were identified as being fit to kill. These animals came directly off grass at 22 months of age without the need for concentrate supplementation.

After these animals were slaughtered, and with grass dry matter dropping, the decision was made to supplement the remaining steers with concentrates at grass. Initially 4kg/head/day of rolled barley was offered to increase the energy density of the overall diet. With this level of supplementary feeding, a further 13 steers were drafted on September 29 after consuming 76kg/head of concentrates.

An additional 10 steers have been identified for slaughter during the week ending October 24. These steers will have consumed approximately 200kg of concentrates prior to slaughter, as a decision was made to increase the level of concentrate feeding to 5kg/head/day from October 1. Depending on how grazing conditions hold up during the final weeks of October and into November, the last 15 steers will either be finished at grass or in the shed.

If the need for housing arises, these animals will be offered high-quality surplus bales to get them over the line. With a November 15 slaughter date target in mind, these steers will have consumed 309kg/head of concentrates while at grass, bringing the average across the group to 162kg/head.

As the feed being offered is rolled barley, the average cost of this supplementary feeding per animal is €31/head.

Table 1: Slaughter performance of Friesian, Hereford and Simmental steers in 2020.

Breed	Age	Carcass weight (kg)	Grade	Fat
FR	22.7	323	O=	3=
HE	22.1	321	O=/O+	3+
SI	22.8	318	O=/O+	3-/3=

The Beef Edge podcast

Tune in to hear the latest episode from Green Acres programme participant JP Hammersley, Co. Tipperary, where he discusses his dairy calf-to-steer system in detail, as part of the 'Beef Masterclass Series'.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Performance evaluation

MICHAEL MCMANUS and PAUL CROSSON, Teagasc Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath report on the performance of the progeny of sires divergent in maternal traits in the Derrypatrick Herd.

The Derrypatrick Herd is a suckler beef research herd based at Teagasc Grange. The current experiment is comparing the performance of the progeny of sires divergent in maternal traits. The herd is predominantly Limousin and Simmental crossbreeds, with replacement heifers purchased as weanlings the autumn prior to breeding. All heifers and cows are bred to AI, with heifers bred to Angus sires and cows bred to a combination of Charolais, Limousin and Simmental sires. The 2020 calving season started on February 14 and finished on May 4. A total of 105 cows calved 110 live calves; this included nine sets of twins and four mortalities. There are 71 bull and 39 heifer calves, with birth weights averaging 44kg and 43kg, respectively. Similar to previous years, the 2020 breeding was by AI only. Breeding started on May 4 and lasted for nine weeks. The objective was to reduce the length of the 2021 calving period. Scanning results showed that 89% of cows and heifers were confirmed pregnant.

Weaning of calves on the Derrypatrick Herd takes place over a week; for example, if there is a group of 30 cows, 10 cows are removed on the Monday, 10 cows are removed on the Wednesday and the remaining 10 cows are removed on the following Monday. The objective of staggering the removal of the cows is to reduce the stress on the calves. Weaning was carried out recently, commencing on October 7 and was completed on October 14. At weaning, the 38 heifer calves (one further mortality) weighed 285kg and so had an average daily gain (ADG) from birth of 1.13kg. The 71 bull/steer weanlings weighed 290kg, with an ADG from birth of 1.17kg. The bull calves were castrated in August and all calves received their pre-weaning booster shot for infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) and pneumonia in September, one month pre weaning. The calves were creep grazing ahead of the cows and were receiving 1kg of meal pre weaning. They will receive 2kg of concentrates until housing. The cows remained indoors on a diet of straw and silage for seven to 10 days until they were dried off. Then they were returned to grass and grazed the paddocks out after the calves.

All beef finishing cattle were housed in mid September and the target is to finish the heifers in October/November at 20 months of age, and steers in December/January at 22 months of age. Liveweight performance over the grazing season (mid April until mid September) and housing weight were 0.9kg/day and 537kg for heifers, and 1.1kg/day and 590kg for steers. Finishing heifers and steers are receiving 5kg of concentrates per head per day and *ad lib* silage. In 2019, heifer carcass weight and grading were 328kg and R+3+. Corresponding figures for steers were 378kg and R+3.

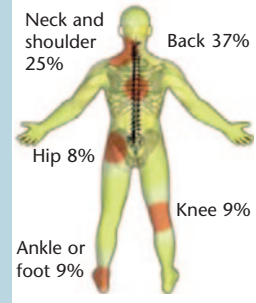
Controlling fluke effectively

Fluke are some of the most common internal parasites found in cattle. There are a huge number of products effective at killing them. Farmers have been aware of the parasites for decades and most treat their cattle at housing for them. However, every year we still see a high percentage of livers in meat processing factories from housed cattle that have live adult liver fluke in them. Why is this? There are a number of possible reasons, including: using a control product that only kills a proportion of the fluke in the animal; underestimating the weight of the animal and not giving enough product; incorrect treatment procedure; and, using a product that the fluke are resistant to.
When purchasing a product to kill liver fluke, the most important question to ask is: "When should I use this product so that it is most effective?" Most of the flukicides that are for sale only control older immature liver flukes and/or adult fluke. This means that any fluke that have been picked up over the previous six to eight weeks or so will not be killed. A second treatment for fluke will then be necessary. Triclabendazole-based products will kill much younger fluke, but Animal Health Ireland (AHI) reports that resistance to them appears quite widespread in Ireland. To be sure that a fluke control programme has actually worked, it is a good idea to send off dung samples for testing eight weeks after you have given the last treatment. Only then will you know for certain whether or not it has been effective.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Prevent musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are injuries of muscles, ligaments, tendons, cartilage, discs and bones. A study among Irish farmers found that 54% reported an MSD, making them the most prevalent occupational health problem. All MSDs, including so-called 'slipped discs', are painful and need rehabilitation. Preventing MSDs requires your input as follows: (1) use equipment and design facilities that eliminate or reduce the need for lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling; (2) always assess a load before lifting; and, (3) keep a tidy and well-lit farmyard to prevent trips and falls. The EU Occupational Safety and Health Agency (EUOSHA) campaign Lighten the Load 2020-22 has commenced. Further information at: https://healthy-workplaces.eu/en.



MSD injuries of Irish farmers.

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