

How to manage beef

Catherine Egan
Teagasc beef specialist



As the grazing season comes to an end, the focus turns to winter management as stock are housed. There are always a number of different groups of cattle housed, such as cows, weanlings and finishing stock, with each requiring different management.

As winter is the most expensive period on most cattle farms, it is important to find the balance between maximising animal performance and keeping costs under control.

Silage quality

Silage quality is key to good animal performance, reducing winter feed costs and increasing profitability during the housing period. Grass silage is the basis of most winter feeding systems in this country and satisfactory animal performance is largely dependent on the adequate intake of good-quality silage.

The level of meal feeding on your farm is determined by the quality of your silage. Therefore, knowing your silage quality must be the starting point when making decisions on concentrate supplementation.

Silage quality needs to be analysed in a lab. A visual assessment or date of cutting may be an indicator, but is not sufficient on its own.

Winter feeding

Suckler cows calving next spring should be fed to appetite on 65 DMD silage once they are in good condition. First and second calvers should be penned together, if possible, and fed 70 DMD silage/65 DMD and 2kg meal. Savings can be made when feeding dry suckler cows with 70-75 DMD silage, as they can be restricted to 80% of intake.

Weanlings/stores ideally need to be gaining 0.6-0.7kg liveweight gain per day. To achieve this target, ad-lib 70-75 DMD silage and 1-2kg of a 14-16% crude protein concentrate should be fed. Winter finishing of beef animals requires a combination of high-quality



Charlie Devaney of Teagasc takes a silage sample. Both he and Roscommon farmer Shane Keaveney build winter feed planning on the analysed quality of the silage.

ty silage (75 DMD) and a high energy, low protein (12% crude protein) concentrate.

If high-quality silage is not available, it is more cost efficient to feed ad-lib concentrates and a clean source of roughage such as straw.

A fast finish over six to eight weeks is the most efficient for forward beef animals. Start with 2-3kg, gradually building up to 5-6kg, depending on the sex, breed, and conformation of animal being fed.

The aim is to have finishing animals gaining a minimum of 1kg liveweight gain per day, which will translate into 0.5-0.60kg carcass weight per day. It is essential that cattle are assessed regularly as they come close to slaughter.

Ideally, this should take place in the

crush, checking the flesh cover on the tail, loin, rib, brisket, flank (and cod, in the case of bulls).

Concentrates

Weanlings fed at higher levels of meal over the winter will weigh heavier going to grass next spring, but compensatory growth with cheaper grass will not be as evident.

If you want to maximise compensatory growth next spring, meal feeding should also be frontloaded – that is, fed at higher levels after housing and allowed to decrease for the last two months of housing.

If cattle are to be finished from the shed, the target ADG for steers is 1.1-1.2kg for the whole period. Bulls can achieve much higher levels of average daily gain.

Table 1 indicates the concentrate feeding rates for weanlings required at different qualities of silage fed to gain 0.6kg/day.

Parasite control

Housing is one of the best times of

Table 1: Concentrate feeding rates for weanlings required at different qualities of silage fed to gain 0.6kg/day.

	Poor	Fair	Good
(Silage DMD)	62	68	72
Continental steers / bulls	3.0	2.0	1.0
Continental heifers	2.6	1.7	0.9
Friesian steers	2.6	1.7	0.9

cattle for the winter

the year for treating cattle against some of the more common internal and external parasites.

Liver fluke, stomach worms, lung worms, lice and mange are the main parasites that cause ill health and poor thrift in cattle.

Clipping the backs of cattle will help stop them overheating and will keep animals cooler. It will also help control lice infestations. There has been a lot of faecal sampling carried out this autumn by participants in the BEEP-S. This data should be utilised when planning your fluke treatment programme. Dosing correctly means using the right product, at the right time, using the correct dose rate and administering it in the right way.

Ventilation

The climate in sheds is determined

by ventilation, temperature, humidity, draughts and dust. Many farmers undervalue the critical role that good ventilation in cattle housing plays in achieving good animal performance, as they are less likely to develop respiratory infections or pneumonia.

Observe and assess air movement and freshness during the housing period. Ventilation supplies fresh air, removes gases, odours, dust, bacteria and removes heat and moisture generated by the housed livestock.

Housing

Suckler cows housed in slatted houses require 2.5-3.0m²/cow, while finishing cattle weighing 550kg-650kg require 2.2-2.5m²/animal and 700kg-800kg animals require 2.6-2.9m²/animal respectively. In order to get the most liveweight gain from your cattle over

the winter months, it is advisable to group animals in accordance with weight.

Weanlings should be housed with comrades of similar size and weight to avoid bullying in the pen and at feeding. The number of stock in the pen should allow each animal to lie in comfort when all stock are lying down.

For youngstock weighing 220-300kg, a lying space of 1.2-1.5 m²/animal on slats and 1.8-3m²/animal on straw is recommended. Feed space is also very important to maximise intakes and weight gain, as outlined in Table 2.

Having enough head space is not always an accurate indicator of sufficient lying space, especially if feeding both sides.

As animals like to eat together, this should be facilitated as far as possible. Finally, it is important to clean water troughs regularly, as cattle forced to drink dirty water will not drink enough, which will suppress their appetite and subsequently thrive.

Table 2: Requirement for feed space (mm/animal).

Feeding regime	Cow	Finishing cattle	Light store cattle	Weanling
Concentrates	600 - 700	600 - 650	500 - 600	400 - 500
Ad-lib roughage	400 - 500	400 - 500	250 - 300	225 - 300

WE'RE HANDING DOWN A 15%* SAVING TO FARMING FAMILIES.

Get a 15% discount on a new policy when you or a family member have an existing policy with FBD.

Visit fbd.ie or call 01 7617 617 to find out more.

*15% multisaver discount applies to new farm, tractor, special works vehicle, agricultural motor or growing trees policies when an existing policy is in force. Customer must be a farmer, 5 years claims free (except glass/windscreen claims).

SUPPORT.
IT'S WHAT WE DO.



Terms and conditions and normal underwriting criteria apply.
FBD Insurance Group Ltd trading as FBD Insurance is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. Farm Insurance is underwritten by FBD Insurance plc.

Farmer focus

Future Beef programme participant Shane Keaveney farms with his wife Grainne and three children, Aaron, Neil and Annie in Ballinlough, Co Roscommon. They operate a spring-calving Saler X, Limousin X herd with a suckling-to-finishing system – bulls are finished under 16 months and heifers that are not kept for breeding are sold as breeding replacements.

The management of the weanlings over the winter is an important part of the system. As all the heifers calve at 24 months on the farm, their target weight gain of 0.6kg/head/day must be achieved, along with putting them out to grass again the following spring to ensure they are at least 390kg at breeding time. Bull calves were introduced to concentrates a month prior to weaning and were fed 2kg, 14% crude protein ration up to housing.

Once housed, they are given 3kg per day (depending on silage quality) and built up gradually to ad-lib concentrates by the beginning of March.

They are then fed ab-lib silage until slaughter. The ad-lib period will vary from animal to animal, but is generally between 90 to 120 days on Shane's farm.

Silage quality plays a major role, with high-DMD silage of 72 DMD made last year. This year's sample has been taken, but there are no results back yet. Heifer weanling will be supplemented with 2kg per day, 14% crude protein ration during the housing period.

The suckler cows are penned according to calving dates and age. The second calvers will be penned with the first calvers and fed the best silage.

The older cows are fed the second-cut silage that was 68DMD last year. Pre-calving mineral will be introduced in late December, six weeks in advance of calving in February/March. Cow condition will be monitored to ensure cows are not in too good condition at calving, to avoid calving difficulty.

A good herd health programme is necessary, as animals cannot afford any setbacks in this system and need to achieve their targets. All weanlings were vaccinated for IBR, RSV and Pi3 prior to weaning. Animals are also dosed for lung and stomach worms prior to housing.

Their backs were clipped and treated for lice at housing. A follow up lice treatment will be given at the end of December.

Shane dung samples his cows for liver and stomach fluke and also monitors the beef health check report for animals that are slaughtered on his farm.

After considering both of these in consultation with his vet, he did not treat for liver fluke last year. This year, he is going to take the same approach.



Shane Keaveney.



Charlie Devaney and Shane Keaveney with some of Shane's Salers.

There is good ventilation in the main slatted shed, which is a five-bay single with a creep lie-back.

The change to Yorkshire boarding on the loose straw-bedded shed has

improved the movement of air throughout the shed, where the weanlings are housed to avoid the impact on thrive over the winter.

—Charlie Devaney