

BEEF

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Planning in preparation for weaning

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With spring-calving herds weaning calves in the coming weeks, now is the time to plan your weaning strategy and vaccination programme.

Weaning can be a stressful time on farms for both the cow and the calf. There are many different weaning strategies. The key points to keep in mind at weaning are to reduce animal stress and minimise the impact on animal performance.

Weaning can be a multi-factorial stressor, in which nutritional, physical, and psychological stresses are combined.

Calves are at one of the most-efficient stages of their lives prior to weaning.

With grass being plentiful on most farms, it is important to utilise it as much as possible.

Creep grazing the calves ahead of the cows allows the calves access to the best-quality grass, maintains thrive and helps break the cow-calf bond in advance of weaning.

Introducing concentrates for four weeks pre weaning and two weeks post weaning will boost animal performance and reduce the stress of weaning on the calf.

Control programmes for stomach worms and lungworm should be developed in advance of weaning in consultation with your vet to reduce stress and disease at weaning.

Tune into *The Beef Edge* podcast for a two-part series podcast on planning in preparation for weaning, with vet Charles Chavasse discussing how to prevent pneumonia and Teagasc Specialist, Aidan Murray, advising how to reduce stress at weaning, on: www.teagasc.ie/thebeefedge.

Climate actions for September



Build grass covers



September is the last month you have to build grass covers and extend your grazing rotation length in order to set your farm up for the last grazing rotation in October and

November. If you don't have a reasonable bank of grass saved up by the end of the month, your last rotation could end up being very short and you will have to house all your stock much sooner than you would like to. September 14 is the last day you can spread nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) fertilisers. The sooner any planned fertiliser applications are spread the better, as growth rates tend to decline as the month progresses.

Now is the ideal time to review your soil samples and identify how much lime is required for specific parts of your farm. Lime has many functions in the soil, from controlling soil acidity and improving soil drainage to increasing the availability of major plant nutrients such as N, P, potassium (K) and sulphur (S). Any remaining slurry can be spread on grazing ground now. Slurry should be targeted to land

where silage has been cut to help replace P and K offtakes. Where additional K is applied as muriate of potash, aim to apply in September/October when ground conditions allow. Beware of grass tetany risk in autumn-calving herds.

The focus for September is to gradually build pre-grazing covers. To help with this, suckler cows being weaned can be restricted to allow covers to build, especially if cows are already in good body condition.

Stock being finished off grass should be supplemented with meal, which will reduce their demand for grass.

The target going into October and the last grazing should be to plan out a 35-40 day rotation. If weather conditions allow it, this would mean that some stock will be grazing until November.

It is important to graze down to a residual of 4-4.5cm in the autumn to stimulate growth throughout the winter and avoid the carryover of dead material over the winter and into the following spring.

Focusing on an off-grass finish



A current task on the Teagasc Green Acres farms is to go through the spring 2020-born stock and select out for feeding those that are suitable for an off-grass finish this autumn. This task needs to be completed promptly once September comes, so the risk of animals having to be housed late in the finishing stages due to bad weather is reduced.

Early-maturing heifers

An off-grass finish prior to the second winter should be targeted for all early-maturing heifers. Finishing should start in early September with heifers weighing 465kg. These heifers can be slaughtered by late October and expected to deliver a carcass weight of 255kg at an O+/O= grade. An average

meal input of 200kg per heifer will be needed during the finishing phase (3-4kg/head/day).

Early-maturing steers 21-month finish

A proportion of the early-maturing steers should also be an option for an off-grass finish. In general, it is the earlier-born steers that will fit into this system and return a carcass weight of 280kg at an O= grade at 21 months old. The meal feeding rate for the finishing period is similar to the heifers at 3-4kg/day for 60 days. The major advantage associated with an off-grass finishing system is that all of the winter accommodation on farm is freed up for wintering younger cattle. This allows for more cattle to be kept on farm even when winter housing space is limited.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Food for thought

The Teagasc strategy applies the total worker health model to support farmers with both health and wellbeing and health and safety. Excess body weight is associated with increased injury, cardiovascular disease, cancers, Covid-19 disease severity, musculoskeletal disorders and depression. An Irish study involving Teagasc found that 62% of male farmer study participants were overweight or obese. A high proportion of diets had a low intake of fruits and vegetables, dairy products and fish, and a high intake of meat, fried foods, salt, and sugary and/or salty snacks. Further information on healthy eating is available from the HSE online guide 'How to Eat Well'. Also, Teagasc is holding half-day health and safety courses in all regions. They are a great way to update your knowledge and motivation on farm



Fruit and veg for health.

health and safety. The course is a requirement for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme 2 (TAMS II) submission grant claim. The current closing date for TAMS II applications is November 5, 2021. Contact your advisor if you want support in making an application.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Pasture and performance



PAUL CROSSON of Teagasc Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath reports on the effect of pasture type and slaughter age on performance of weanling-to-beef systems.

Compared to perennial ryegrass-based pastures, multi-species pastures (swards including mixes of grasses, legumes and herbs) may confer agronomic and animal performance benefits for beef cattle production systems. For example, recent research at Teagasc Grange has shown increases in annual herbage yield of circa 25% for mixed-species swards compared to perennial ryegrass swards.

In terms of animal performance, a recent Irish study reported superior performance in ewes, and in daily gain of their lambs up to six weeks of age, when grazing multi-species swards compared to perennial ryegrass swards.

Achieving liveweight targets throughout the animal's lifetime is key to efficient beef production and so the impact of different pastures on this performance measure is critical. Nationally, mean age at slaughter for late-maturing suckler-bred steers is 29 months, which is six months later than achieved in grass-based research systems and high-performing commercial farms. Older animals at slaughter are generally less profitable and have a substantially higher environmental footprint. Lifetime production costs, mainly feed related, and

environmental emissions, particularly methane and N, are increased. However, it is challenging to achieve adequate carcass fatness at young slaughter ages on low-cost grass-based systems, especially with late-maturing genotypes.

Using a combination of animal genetics (late-maturing breeds differing in propensity to deposit fat) and pasture types (perennial ryegrass based vs multi-species swards) a multi-faceted project is commencing at Teagasc Grange to assess the potential to enhance production efficiency and reduce age at slaughter, a key driver of financial and greenhouse gas emissions performance for beef production systems.

Multi-species swards also have the potential to reduce fertiliser N inputs and potentially the associated environmental footprint, thereby increasing the sustainability of beef systems. This will also be quantified in this research study. The overall objective of the study is to assess the impact of genetic divergence for fatness in late-maturing breeds, pasture type and slaughter age on the economic, biological, health and greenhouse gas emissions performance of suckler weanling-to-beef production systems.