

BEEF

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Fertiliser prices

Edited by
Catherine Egan,
Beef Specialist



With the increased cost of fertiliser, applying the same amount of fertiliser as in previous years is simply not an option for most beef farmers.

The aim this year will be to maximise grass growth while at the same time using chemical fertiliser strategically to boost growth where most needed.

It is important that adequate grass is available for grazing livestock and winter forage for the coming year while trying to reduce chemical fertiliser use. Some points to consider for your farm are:

1. Take soil samples to establish the level of soil fertility.
2. Apply ground limestone (based on results) as soon as possible. This will mobilise nutrients from the soil.
3. Complete a winter fodder budget once all animals are turned out this spring. This will help to establish how much fodder is left over and help you to calculate how much ground needs to be closed in the coming year.



Fertiliser will need to be managed carefully this year.

4. Maximise the use of slurry and farmyard manure (FYM) by using it earlier when utilisation will be better, and it can play a greater role in offsetting some of the chemical fertiliser requirements. Use low-emission slurry spreading (LESS) equipment if possible.
5. Seek alternative sources of organic manure if available locally (e.g., pig slurry).
6. Calculate how much fertiliser you can purchase. Keep in mind the cost relative to what was purchased the previous year and the scope of merchant credit.
7. Purchase the minimum compound fertiliser you need to maintain soil phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) on the farm.
8. Early turnout should be targeted (weather depending) to kick-start the grazing season.

Protect your regrowth and maximise growth rates.

9. Reduce the number of grazing groups on the farm. This makes it easier to rotationally graze stock and allows for faster regrowth.
10. Stocking rate on farm should be reviewed. Look at ways of reducing stock that are not performing and that will not negatively impact profit.

This year will be an opportunity for beef farmers to take stock of their production system. Look at what is working and what is not. Complete a profit monitor for your farm for 2021 and a projected budget for 2022. Investment in soil fertility, incorporating clover, upgrading grazing infrastructure and genetics will all improve the resilience of your farm.



The Beef Edge Podcast

The Beef Edge is Teagasc's fortnightly podcast covering news, information, tips and advice for beef farmers.

Presented by Catherine Egan, The Beef Edge provides insights and opinion to improve your beef farm performance.

How do I listen?

The Beef Edge is available on:

 iPhone  Android  Spotify

Open the camera on your phone & scan the QR code for more information



Calf rearing – key tips



One of the many key elements to the success of a calf-to-beef system is ensuring animals are adequately fed.

It is critical that calves double their birth weight by eight weeks of age

(e.g., 40kg to 80kg in 56 days). To realise this, animals must gain 700-800g/day during the milk-feeding stage. This can be achieved with inputs of ~25kg of milk replacer and 120kg of concentrates. As part of the current dairy beef research programme at Teagasc Grange, once calves arrived on farm at three weeks of age all calves were reared on 4L/day (0.5kg solids) of milk replacer (23% protein, 20% oil, 7% ash and 0.1% fibre), and fed at 12.5% concentration, split between two feeds. This milk feeding level was adapted based on the previous data, where half of the calves purchased were reared on either 4L

or 8L of milk replacer daily from three weeks of age, which resulted in similar levels of performance, from weaning through to slaughter, and a €33/head reduction in calf-rearing costs. Along with ensuring the calf is fed appropriately, the protection of health is also critical and this can be achieved through the implementation of an appropriate vaccination programme, providing cover for pneumonia, infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), and clostridial diseases. Pneumonia is the most common disease associated with housed calves, with mortality rates of approximately 3% recorded in calves in the first three months of life. Before calves begin to arrive this spring, an evaluation of the calf housing available must be completed to see if it is fit for purpose and to rectify any problems or issues that may have occurred last spring.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Give safety first priority

In 2021, nine farm workplace deaths occurred in agriculture (crop and animal production), two in forestry and logging, and one was related to farm construction (provisional data). Thus, 12 workplace fatalities occurred on farms. Of the nine agriculture deaths, four each were in the 35-54 and 65 and older age categories, with one aged 17 years or under. Four of the farm deaths were associated with farm vehicles, three with livestock, one with a fall from height, and one due to a wound. The forestry and logging fatal injuries were associated with cutting timber on farms. The construction death related to a wall collapse during construction. These fatalities are tragic occurrences, and our sympathies go to the bereaved. We all need to give farm safety first priority in the year ahead. From



Cows with calves can be dangerous.



Beware of tractors and other large machinery.

February on farms get busy, which increases risk. Hurry and rushing are major factors associated with farm injuries. Pay particular attention to avoiding tractor knockdown or crush injuries, or getting attacked by a cow with a newborn calf during the coming months.

RESEARCH UPDATE



Fluke

ORLA KEANE of Teagasc, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath reports on what farmers need to think about when it comes to fluke.

In 2021 many farmers participated in the Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme – Sucklers (BEEP-S). One optional action was faecal egg testing, where 10 fresh faecal samples from cows had to be submitted to an approved laboratory for faecal egg testing by October 1, 2021.

These samples were tested for the presence of liver fluke and rumen fluke eggs. Fluke control programmes should be discussed with your vet or advisor and a number of factors taken into account when assessing the risk of disease due to fluke, including results from the BEEP-S action.

While fluke eggs indicate the presence of adult fluke, a negative fluke egg test does not confirm the absence of fluke, as immature fluke that have not yet started to lay eggs may be present.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), in conjunction with Met Éireann, produce a liver fluke forecast each year that predicts the risk of liver fluke disease throughout the country.

The forecast predicts a high prevalence of liver fluke disease in the west and north-west, occasional disease for much of the country, and little or no disease in parts of the east.

The liver fluke forecast is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/d5152-liver-fluke-forecast-november-2021/>.

In addition, for farmers in the Animal Health Ireland (AHI) Beef HealthCheck programme, slaughter reports from the abattoir can also indicate if liver fluke is present on the farm.

Farmers can view and download these reports from the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) website.

The detection of live liver fluke at slaughter or liver fluke eggs in faeces may indicate that a review of liver fluke control should be undertaken.

However, adult rumen fluke are generally considered not very pathogenic and the presence of rumen fluke eggs in faecal samples does not necessarily indicate that treatment is warranted.

When treating cows for fluke, pay attention to the choice of product to ensure it targets the correct stage of fluke (immature or adult) and avoid the use of combination wormer/flukicides unless there is a demonstrated need to treat for worms, as the unnecessary use of wormers can accelerate the development of anthelmintic resistance.