Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

DAIRY

August 2022

Setting grazing up for autumn

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PastureBase Ireland data over the last few years has shown that many dairy farms end up with a lower supply of grass than targeted entering into autumn. August is the crucial month when management priority now shifts from controlling pre-grazing covers to building grass supply. It is important that a rotation length of 28-30 days is reached by September 1. On many farms silage area comes back into grazing in August, thereby lengthening the rotation. Baling out surplus grass covers ceases. If things are not going to plan during August in terms of building grass supply, further action needs to be taken. Non-milking stock should be removed from the milking platform. Additional feed can be introduced for a period to help slow down the rotation. This can be baled silage or meal or a mixture of both. Whatever the choice, it is better that additional feed goes into the herd during August to allow grass

Table 1: Autumn grazing targets.

Date	Cover/cow (kg DM)	Average farm cover (kg DM/ha)	Rotation length
MILKING PLATFORM STOCKING RATE OF 2.5 COWS/HA			
August 1	180	450	20 days
Mid August	200	500	25 days
September 1	300	750	30 days
MILKING PLATFORM STOCKING RATE OF 3.5 COWS/HA			
August 1	190	665	20 days
Mid August	220	770	25 days
September 1	280	980	30 days

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supply to pick up rapidly, rather than later on when grass growth is much slower. The growth of grass during the next six weeks is extremely important as the rate of growth (supply) will be less than what is eaten (demand) by mid September in most years. The autumn grazing targets for September 1 are outlined in the **Table 1**.

Teagasc fodder survey

Teagasc conducted a survey of silage stocks on over 500 farms nationally in July. Results showed that on average, there is a 15-20% surplus of silage on farms, relative to normal winter demand. This is a very positive position considering the serious issues with fertiliser costs this year.

Looking at the figures in more detail, the midlands/north east and south east areas (corresponding to Leinster and Tipperary/Waterford) showed the lowest fodder supply (**Table 2**). Dry weather through July may have tightened supply somewhat in these areas in particular. About 10-15% of farms in these regions had a deficit of more than 10%. Nationally, while the overall figure is good, there remains about one farm in eight with a projected shortage.

Given that purchased feed will be very expensive this year and silage stocks may not be readily traded, individual farms need to act now to secure the fodder balances heading into autumn. The priorities are:

- completing a winter feed budget this week – contact your Teagasc advisor for details;
- identifying non-productive stock for early sale (high somatic cell count (SCC) cows, empty cows and maiden heifers, older stock bulls, etc.) – small, early reductions in stock numbers add up to big feed savings; and,
- securing extra silage on the stem – quality and cost of late-season silage has to be questioned but may work where a deal on a good standing crop is possible. Your advisor will help with costings.

Table 2: Fodder supplies nationally.

Enterprise	Region	Average percentage in stock July (%)	Percentage of farms with a deficit of more than 10% (%)
Dairy	South west	116	6
Dairy	South east	113	17
Dairy	North west	109	9
Dairy	Midlands/North east	99	19
Drystock	South west	129	7
Drystock	South east	121	16
Drystock	North west	126	12
Drystock	Midlands/North east	110	22

Lame cows – the next six weeks are crucial

As we move toward the latter part of the grazing season, what can we do to reduce the number of lame dairy cows we see on the farm?

We can identify and hoof-pare any cows that exhibit signs of lameness as early as possible. Numerous studies have clearly shown that prompt, effective treatment of cows affected by hoof lameness achieves the fastest recovery and the quickest return to full production.

We often see cows on farms that become chronically lame. That is to say, cows that get lame, stay lame. A key benefit of early treatment is a marked reduction in the number of cows that suffer chronic lameness. If your experience is that you are culling chronically affected lame cows each year, competent treatment earlier in the course of the lameness event greatly reduces the risk of cows developing a chronic lameness condition that could result in their culling. Teagasc estimates the cost of a two-year old replacement calved heifer is €1,500. If a farmer can reduce the number of cows culled due to lameness and achieve longer productive life spans from as many cows as possible in their herd, he/she will need fewer replacement heifers. The need to carry fewer replacement heifers will help to reduce his/her stocking rate and as a result reduce the carbon footprint of the farm.

If mortellaro or digital dermatitis are present on your farm, increasing the frequency of foot bathing in the weeks leading up to housing and post-housing is an important step in control of this disease over the winter months. The bacteria that cause the condition are carried in the skin in the vicinity of the hoof and many cows are carriers. Regular foot bathing and keeping yards and sheds as clean as possible are the key control measures.

Preparing for clean and comfortable cows next winter

As workload eases at this time of year, it is a good opportunity to review your cow housing for the winter period and to carry out any necessary repairs, and maybe plan for longer-term solutions.

The housing of your cows and heifers in a clean and comfortable environment will ensure that the highest quality, clean milk free from mastitis will be produced. Any reduction in teat end contamination improves mastitis control during the dry or lactation periods. Two major factors that lead to an increase in mastitis and bacterial contamination of milk are:

- housing where the confinement of cows increases closer cow-to-cow contact and leads to increased faecal contamination; and,
- humidity where damp conditions promote the movement of faeces onto udders and increase the level of environmental bacteria.

The Winter Housing Checklist, available on the Animal Health Ireland (AHI) website (https://animalhealthireland.ie/assets/uploads/2021/10/CCK-Winter-Housing-Checklist-2021-FINAL-FILLABLE.pdf?dl=1), is a very useful reference to look at cow hygiene, as well as housing and management practices on your farm. In addition, you may consult with your veterinary practitioner, farm advisor or CellCheck advisor using the CellCheck farm guidelines available at: https://animalhealthireland.ie/programmes/cellcheck/farm-guidelines/, as a reference to discuss areas of concern on winter housing. Cow hygiene scoring is your starting point to look at shed maintenance for the winter.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Take care with machinery

August is harvest month with a lot of machinery movement on farms and on public roads, including trailers, balers and silage gear. Machinery movement brings danger, particularly to bystanders including children and older farmers. A vehicle travelling at a walking speed of 5km/hour travels at 1.4 metres per second. Being struck by a machine causes bystander deaths and injuries due to the impact force.

In August also, a lot of use is made of powered machines, so make sure moving parts are guarded. This applies particularly to machines used in a stationary position, like augers and slurry tanker drive shafts. Entanglement in a machine moving part leads to horrific injuries. Children are 'out and about' in August enjoying the summer before the return to school, so continued farm safety measures are necessary.

Store bales safely.

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