

BEEF

October 2023

What's your grazing management plan?

Edited by
Catherine Egan,
Cattle Specialist

Your grazing management plan in October will determine how much grass you will have on your farm next February and March. Farms that are targeting to turn at least some stock out between Valentine's Day and St Patrick's Day need to start closing up fields and paddocks no later than October 10. These fields will continue to grow grass over the coming weeks, building up covers that will remain there over winter. As these are the fields you will be grazing first in the spring, you should choose the drier parts of

the farm that give you the best chance for an early turnout. The target should be to stop grazing 15% of your farm per week between now and November 10. The remaining 40% of the farm can then be grazed up until all stock are housed for the winter. Before closing, make sure swards are well grazed out, allowing light to reach the base of the plant. This is important as it encourages tillering over the winter months, and is especially important if you are trying to maintain the white clover content of your sward.

Meal feeding calves and weanlings

Dairy-bred calves need to be supplemented at grass in the autumn to ensure that they continue to grow. Depending on grass supply and weather, calves should be fed between 1.0 and 1.5kg of concentrate per head per day until housing. The crude protein in the ration should be between 12 and 14% in the dry matter. Suckler-bred weanlings

will also benefit from meal feeding at this time of year. Bull calves that are being targeted for finishing under 16 months of age and heifer weanlings that you intend putting in calf next spring are priority stock for feeding. The bulls should be built up onto 2-3kg of a ration, while the replacement heifers should be on at least 1.5kg.

Silage quality and quantity

Have you tested your grass silage this year? With lower levels of fertiliser spread this year and delayed cutting dates on many farms, the suspicion is that silage quality may be lower than in previous years. Alternatively, where crops were cut at the correct grass growth stage and quality is good, there may be an opportunity to cut back on the amount of meal that needs to be fed to growing cattle in a

year where meal prices are rising fast. Either way, you need to send in your silage samples so that you can make an informed decision. Completing a fodder budget sooner rather than later is an important job this month to ensure that you have time to take action if you are short. Be realistic on the likely length of the winter feeding period for your farm and build in a 20% buffer.

Vaccination

A pneumonia outbreak around housing is one of the leading causes of death in beef weanlings. Stress, overcrowding and poor ventilation are the main reasons for these outbreaks. Losses are common and even where deaths are kept to a minimum, there is a long-term impact on animal performance, with significantly increased workloads and disruption all round. While improving the management and housing of weanlings goes a long way towards reducing pneumonia, having a vaccination programme that covers the main respiratory diseases in advance of the housing period should be

considered on all farms. Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), parainfluenza-3 (PI3) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are the three main causes of infection. Speak to your vet about which products you should use coming into the autumn. If you vaccinated calves in the spring, you only need to give single booster shots now. If, however, these are their first vaccinations, you may have to give a primary and a booster shot. Shop around for the best value as there can be huge differences in the prices charged from one veterinary practice to the next for the exact same products.

Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme deadlines

October 16: Bord Bia Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS)

October 31: At least 50% of the yearly reference

number are eligible females that are genotyped 4 or 5 stars on the replacement index

November 1: Weights must be submitted

Date for your diary

Teagasc, in conjunction with Animal Health Ireland, is running a series of walks across the country this month to discuss key topics in advance of housing, such as the correct dosing

protocol, vaccination programmes, nutrition and maximising performance. Further details are available on www.teagasc.ie.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Breeding and weaning update



COLIN BYRNE, Animal and Bioscience Research Department, Teagasc Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath, reports on the breeding performance of the maternal herd and weaning update.

Breeding

Breeding took place for 10 weeks beginning on May 2 until July 11. Two rounds of sexed female semen were used on all animals followed by one round of conventional semen if needed. The bulls used are described in the June Future Beef newsletter. For conventional semen, the AM/PM rule was applied for AI. For sexed semen, the recommended AI time is 16-22 hours after first observed in standing heat, with the later the better in this timeframe applied. For sexed semen at Grange, animals were inseminated 22-24 hours after the start of standing heat.

The final pregnancy scan took place on August 25, 2023. Overall, the pregnancy rate is 76%. While low, this is in line with the 85% typical pregnancy rate achieved in the herd over the past number of years.

Pre-wean performance build-up to weaning

2023 has seen excellent pre-weaning performance in calves. On September 13, calves averaged 278kg, growing at 1.21kg/day since birth. Males were castrated on August 30, and all calves received bovine respiratory disease and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis booster vaccines on September 13. Calves have been creep grazed since July. Weaning will begin in mid-October. Weaning will start with the heaviest 30% of calves. The dams of these



Calves have been creep grazed since July.

calves will be removed and housed to dry off, five days later the next heaviest 30% will have their dams removed, and the same for the remainder another five days after. It is important that paddocks are secure and ideally are a reasonable distance from the cows.

Ongoing methane research

During the production cycles of 2022 and 2023, methane was measured at grass and during the dry period, with dry matter intake estimated at the same time points from first cross dairy cows or beef x beef cows and beef x beef cows of average or high genetic merit. This will allow us to outline how breeding strategy can be used as a tool to reduce on-farm methane emissions. The analysis of these data is ongoing and will allow the characterisation of methane output from suckler cows with the aim of providing accurate information for Ireland's national greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories.

Previous updates are available in the June edition of the Future Beef newsletter.

12 STEPS TO REDUCING EMISSIONS



Over 12 months, the Teagasc advisory newsletters will outline actions farmers can take to reduce their emissions.

Step 10: Reduce age at first calving

How does this reduce emissions?

75% of beef heifers in Ireland are unproductive for a year longer than they should be, meaning more methane emissions in their lifetime. Heifers calving down at 24 months compared to 36 months have a 12% lower carbon footprint – 11.2 versus 12.7kg CO₂eq/kg liveweight.

Is there a gain for me?

Calving heifers at 24 versus 36 months of age will improve economic performance. Calving heifers younger increases the overall herd's gross output and hence profit. A net margin of €152/cow is achievable when heifers calve at 24 months vs €38/cow when heifers calve at 36 months.

What action do I take?

Pre-weaning is the most important time for influencing age at puberty. Aim for pre-weaning average daily gain of 1.2kg/day by ensuring that cows are 'milky' and a target weight at breeding of 380-420kg.




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

