Teagasc
Advisory
Newsletter

BEEF

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Body condition scoring

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The 'How to body condition score a suckler cow' video is available online.

Assessing the body condition score (BCS) of suckler cows is fundamental to managing a successful herd. Regularly monitoring BCS at critical stages throughout the year enables targeted management to optimise performance and reduce costs. BCS is measured on a scale of 0 to 5. For a detailed guide on scoring, Google search for "BCS Teagasc video", where Eddie Mulligan from Teagasc Grange provides an excellent tutorial. For spring-calving herds, aim for cows to have a BCS of approximately 3.5 at housing. Over winter,

REMEMBER, COWS MAY LOSE ABOUT

0.25

BCS from pre to post calving, so the ideal BCS post calving is 2.5.

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cows can lose condition, reducing feed costs significantly. Proper BCS assessment requires handling cows through a crush. Group cows based on their condition as follows:

- first and second calvers: pen these separately; and,
- mature cows: divide into three groups – thin, fat, and those in optimal condition.

Feeding recommendations:

- thin cows: provide high-quality silage and, if necessary, supplementary concentrates until they reach at least a BCS of 2.75.
- fat cows: restrict their diet, adjusting based on silage quality.

Monitor body condition continuously to ensure cows maintain a BCS of at least 2.75 before calving. Remember, cows may lose about 0.25 BCS from pre to post calving, so the ideal BCS post calving is 2.5. By carefully managing body condition, you can enhance herd health, improve productivity, and minimise costs.

Take stock

As we approach the end of the year and start planning for next year, now is a good time to take stock of what you have achieved in 2024 and what adjustments need to be made in 2025. For example some questions you might ask yourself might be:

- Did I make enough fodder for a long winter?
- Are there fields that are low in soil fertility that need lime or more phosphorus (P) and potassium (K)?
- Are my cows fit for purpose or do I need to improve the type of replacements I am bringing into the herd?
- Are the calves I am buying right for my system of beef production?

Decide now on two or three improvements you are going to make next year. Write them down and take a picture of them. This time next year you can look back and see what progress you are making.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Staying safe over Christmas

The Christmas holidays will see children spending more time out and about. If children are out on the farm, they must always be supervised. This time of year can be a great opportunity to talk to them about the dangers of a farm. The risk of fire also increases during Christmas. Give preventing fires in your home and on your farm special attention during this period. It's important that safety is kept to the fore in everyone's minds over the festive period.

Keep safety in mind over the Christmas period.

Think before you buy

During our recent Getting Winter Ready farm walks, one of the most discussed topics was selecting the right product to treat cattle for liver fluke. This year, as with last, the wet weather across the country has left few farms – if any – able to skip fluke treatments after housing.

What product to use?

But which product is the right choice? Stomach and lung worms differ significantly. Unlike stomach worms, liver fluke takes 10 to 12 weeks to mature after being ingested by cattle. Most products on the market are only effective against fluke at specific stages of its lifecycle.

Some target immature fluke, while others work only when the parasite is fully grown. Before purchasing a treatment, it's crucial to understand whether it will effectively target the stage of fluke you need to control. Using the wrong product can be a waste of time and money. For instance, if you choose a product containing clorsulon, it is most effective 12 weeks after housing, once the fluke has fully matured. Alternatively, you could treat cattle at housing but would need to repeat the treatment 12 weeks later for full effectiveness. Selecting the correct product and timing your treatment properly ensures better outcomes for your herd and optimises your investment in parasite control.

Different products target fluke at different stages of its lifecycle.

Take a break

At this year's National Beef Conference, Shane Pearson delivered an outstanding talk on building resilience into our daily lives. He emphasised that being more resilient enables us to better handle the challenges life throws our way and approach stress in a more positive manner. One of Shane's key pieces of advice was to ensure we keep our personal 'battery' charged. The Christmas season is the perfect opportunity to take a well-deserved break and start planning how to maintain that energy in the year ahead. Taking time away from everyday work could be an excellent first step. Wishing you and your family a very Happy Christmas from all of us at Teagasc!

Nitrogen rate effect

RESEARCH UPDATE

E.G. O'RIORDAN, M.J. KELLY, S. BURKE AND M. MCGEE of Teagasc Grange, Co. Meath report on the effect of nitrogen fertiliser application rate on herbage yield and sward white clover content.

Grass-white clover swards comprised of perennial ryegrass (Aberchoice, 25kg/ha) and white clover (Aberherald, 5kg/ha) were established in autumn 2018 at Teagasc Grange. For the next four years they received an annual chemical fertiliser nitrogen (N) application rate of either zero, 100, 200 or 300kg N/ha in the form of calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN), with P and K fertiliser applied as necessary. The annual N distributions for the N fertiliser treatments were 25%, 25%, 25%, 15% and 10% in April, May, June, July and August, respectively. Pastures were harvested at monthly intervals. The mean relative annual herbage production is summarised in **Figure 1**. Taking the grass-clover sward receiving 300kg N/ha as the reference point, grass-clover receiving zero N, 100kg N/ha or 200kg N/ha had relative yields of

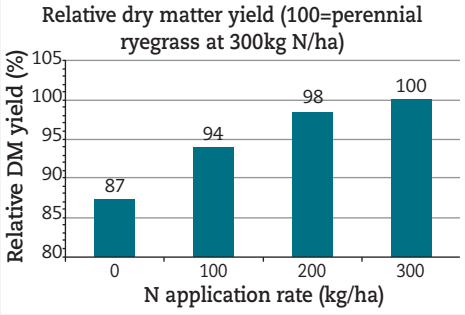

FIGURE 1: Relative herbage dry matter yield (perennial ryegrass-white clover receiving 300kg N/ha = 100).

87%, 94% and 98%, respectively. The contribution of clover to herbage dry matter yield was very seasonal (**Figure 2**). Swards receiving zero N had, on average, 40% clover over the year. Each additional 100kg N/ha approximately halved the sward clover content (i.e., to 22%, 11% and 7%, for the 100, 200 and 300kg N/ha treatments, respectively).

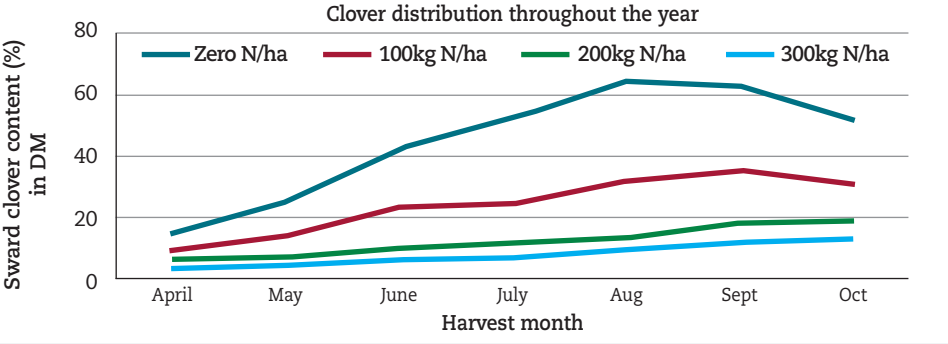

FIGURE 2: Average sward clover content (%) over the year.