

BEEF

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Assessing fodder

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The poor weather last year had a big impact on when animals were housed.

Teagasc completed a national fodder survey in October, which indicated fodder deficit issues on some farms. The farms surveyed had a 9-15% shortfall in silage reserves.

Reasons for shortfall

Poor conditions around silage harvest and autumn grazing were the main reasons. Animals are being housed for longer than anticipated in some regions, which results in faster use of fodder reserves. Livestock have potentially been indoors for three to four months or more, depending on location.



SHORTFALL OF
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IN SILAGE
RESERVES

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TEAGASC ADVISORY NEWSLETTER

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Assess your situation by completing a mid-winter fodder budget. Review stock numbers and use **Table 1** to work out your requirements.

Points to note:

- when measuring the fresh weight in tonnes in your silage pit, use length X width X height in metres and divide your answer by 1.4 (silage pit at 22% dry matter); and,
- fresh weight of bales can vary – as a guide allow 700kg per bale.

Farmers need to be watchful of fodder reserves this winter. Action not taken in a deficit will lead to further pressure as housing continues.

Fodder deficit options

These are some options available to farmers in a fodder deficit: purchasing additional silage/meal (check quality); selling stock; meal feeding; or, finishing animals quicker. Teagasc has developed a ration reckoner to compare feed ingredients relative to price and value – seek advice from your advisor.

Table 1: Calculate the fodder demand on your farm.

Stock type	No. of stock (A)	Winter months (B)	Tonnes of fresh weight of silage required per month (C)	Total required (A X B X C)
Suckler cows			1.4	
Two+ year olds			1.3	
One to two year olds			1.3	
Weanlings			0.7	
Total tonnes of fodder required				

Drafting cattle for slaughter

Drafting animals for slaughter with too little or too much fat cover can affect market price. Animals on a finishing diet for the last 70 to 80 days could be coming fit for slaughter.

When to draft

Animals at the desired fat score of 3+ should be drafted. After this there is a cut-off in efficiency and thrive reduces. Weigh and assess cattle regularly during finishing. This aids good decision-making when animals become fit for slaughter. A



Weigh and assess cattle regularly during finishing.

drop in daily liveweight gain and adequate fat cover are signs that an animal is nearly ready. Prolonging the finishing period after this point is generally uneconomical.



Liver fluke forecast

The annual liver fluke disease forecast indicates there is a high risk of the disease in almost all areas of the country.

Liver fluke causes chronic infections, depressed feed intake, and reduced fertility and thrive. Heavy infections can result in anaemia. Swelling under the jaw and poor coat are also signs.

Drainage issues cause problems

Damp, poorly drained conditions provide an ideal habitat for the intermediate host, the mud snail. The risk of fluke can vary between regions, farms and year depending on weather and ground conditions.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), in conjunction with Met Éireann, produce a yearly forecast on the risk of liver fluke disease. The 2023-24 forecast predicts a high risk across Ireland, except in south Leinster (moderate risk). The high risk is due to heavy summer rainfall and mild temperatures. The forecast can be found at: shorturl.at/biLS4.

Wet weather increases infection risk

Data from Animal Health Ireland's (AHI) Beef Health Check shows a fall in cattle with liver fluke at slaughter – 25% in



Ensure the product you use targets the correct fluke stage.

2016 to <10% more recently. The wet summer in 2023 is expected to increase infection risk. Slaughter reports can indicate if liver fluke is present on a farm. Other tools, such as faecal egg counts, may also be useful, although this test cannot detect immature fluke.

Treatment advice

When treating look at the product to ensure it targets the correct stage of fluke (immature or adult). Avoid combination wormers/flukicides unless there is a need. Unnecessary use of these medicines can accelerate resistance to them. All parasite control measures should be discussed with your vet or animal health advisor.

RESEARCH UPDATE



Make 2024 safe and healthy

Sadly, 13 fatal farm workplace accidents occurred in 2023. Teagasc research shows that workload, rushing and tiredness are major factors, so good planning and preparation are key to reduce risk.

Keep facilities and machines well maintained, allow sufficient time to get each job done safely and seek help during busy periods.

Take care of your own health

Update your farm's risk assessment document now. It will help you to identify and remedy hazards and risks. Also think about your health. January is a great time to get a health check done and to take on health-enhancing measures, e.g., diet, exercise, and/or a hobby.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Leading the way



The Signpost demonstration cattle farmers are adopting measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- better slurry spreading – low-emission slurry spreading (LESS) on Signpost farms doubled from 2021 to 2022; and,
- using clover – 40% of Signpost cattle farms clover-scored their farms in 2022 – 82% of grassland had some clover.

Cutting the need for chemical N

Signpost farms have focused on reducing chemical nitrogen (N) use, by:

- optimising soil fertility – soils at optimum pH, phosphorus (P) and potassium (K): 26%;
- applying lime to correct low soil pH – Signpost cattle farms were soil sampled in 2021 and the results used to target lime applications in 2022;

The application rate of chemical N was 15% lower in 2022 than in 2021.

A sustainable reduction in chemical N, without impacting grass production, can only be achieved when the above actions are put in place. The quantity of protected urea used has also doubled on Signpost farms.