

BEEF

May 2024

Grass



Keep quality grass in front of animals and get silage cut.

Spring has finally sprung, and priorities now are to keep quality grass in front of animals and get silage cut. The recommendation was to apply 25-30 units of nitrogen (N) per acre to grazing ground in April as 18-6-12 plus sulphur (S) if you had the allowance on your nutrient management plan, or as protected urea (38% N plus 7% S) if not, and follow with 20 units N per acre every three weeks for May and June. Remove any heavy covers as surplus bales to maintain quality and build silage reserves. Cut silage in mid May to ensure quality, but also to allow for a good second cut. This will optimise quantity and quality while also giving you options should we get a drought in June.

EDITED BY
MARTINA HARRINGTON,
MANAGER OF THE FUTURE
BEEF PROGRAMME



OBSERVE AND RECORD

heats and
inseminations –

20-25%
of bulls
are sub-fertile.

Get your cow back in calf

The key to any profitable suckler beef farm is having a calf per cow per year. The first part of the equation is now complete – getting a live calf on the ground – and the second part comes now in getting that cow back in calf. The key factors to be considered are:

- body condition score (BCS);
- calf-cow bond;
- is synchronisation an option?;
- heat detection and records; and,
- bull fertility.

Rising plane of nutrition

Hormones controlling nutrition and fertility are closely linked. The ideal is to have the cow in good BCS (2.75) at calving and then maintain or increase it by getting her to grass (difficult this year) or feeding higher quality silage plus meal. The basic rule is to try and keep a steady or rising plane of nutrition and avoid sudden changes. If cows are slow to come into heat, what can you do to help?

- Restrict suckling. By separating the cow and calf from day 30 after calving, and practising twice daily suckling for two weeks, up to 85-90% of cows should show heat within 18-22 days. It is important to separate both by at least 50 metres, as sight and smell have a role in the bonding effect.
- If the breeding season is extended, consider synchronising cows calved more than 35 days. A simple



A calf per cow per year is important for beef farm profitability.

programme would be: day 0, Monday at 10.00am – insert the PRID/CIDR and inject with GNRH; and, seven days later, Monday at 10.00am, remove the PRID/CIDR and inject with prostaglandin and PMSG. The PMSG is beneficial if cows are not cycling or are thin.

- Cows will start to show heat the following evening. Most heats are expected on day 9, Wednesday. You can heat detect and use the AM-PM rule, or if using fixed-time AI, go 72 hours after PRID/CIDR removal – Thursday morning at 10.00am. Cows not in calf will come back cycling, on average, 21 days later. In Teagasc research trials on 85 herds and 2,200 cows, 80% of cows were pregnant in the first three weeks of the breeding season using this protocol. If using a bull here, remember that all these cows will come bulling at the same time. Have you enough bulls, or will you have to use AI? Remember,

while all cows will be inseminated on the same day they will not calve on the same day the following spring, with a 10-day spread in calving typically observed.

Scan the QR code for detailed synchronisation programmes.



Heat detection and record keeping are key

For AI, you need to observe cows three to four times a day to be successful in picking up heats and timing AI. Use heat detection aids such as a vasectomised bull and a chin ball, tail paint, etc. With both bulls and AI, have a system of recording heats and inseminations. This will alert you to an issue with your bull's fertility. If you see an unusually high number of cows you thought were bulled again (after three weeks), you have an issue and you need to act fast. Replace the bull and then fertility test him. Remember up to 20-25% of bulls are sub-fertile.

With breeding bulls, a good rule of thumb for the proper bull-to-female ratio is one cow or heifer per month of age of the bull up to 30 months of age. Ensure you see your bulls (especially young bulls) actually mating cows. Some can have penile issues. Don't allow them to lose too much condition. A small amount of meal daily can help.

Heifers to calve at 24 months

Hopefully your maiden heifers have been out at grass the longest, as they need to be 60% of their mature body weight at breeding. For the average suckler cow (700kg) that is 420kg. Cows bred lighter than this may have issues calving, going back in calf next year, and reaching their mature body weight. With good grassland management and compensatory growth they should meet target weights. One option is to breed them in June to an easy calving sire (<7% calving difficulty with >80% reliability). Use a short gestation bull and calve to grass early next year.

Weaning dairy calves

From a week of age, calves should have been offered straw and concentrate to develop the rumen to eat grass once weaned. When calves are 90kg or so and eating 1.5kg of concentrate for at least three consecutive days, they can be weaned. Turn out to a sheltered field, on a dry day and avoid paddocks that have high levels of N



At 90kg and when eating 1.5kg of meal a day for three days in a row, calves can be weaned.

applied or very lush covers. Maintain meal feeding for at least six weeks.

TEAGASC ADVISORY NEWSLETTER

BEEF



Safety in mind at this busy time

May is a high-risk month. Tasks must be planned with safety in mind. Delayed spring field work combined with silage making and other field operations will bring increased machinery into fields, farmyards and onto public roads. Drive at a speed that is appropriate to the load and ground conditions. Be vigilant of hazards like blind spots around machines and the

risk of a person being knocked down or crushed. Machine operators must have a clear view as they enter/exit public roads. Talk to your contractor in advance to plan work and inform them of hazards. Keep children and people not involved in work clear of moving machinery. Tidy farmyards will help make machinery movement easier.



HEALTH & SAFETY



Keep children away from machinery.