

# BEEF

April 2025

## Grassland management



*If you haven't already closed off your silage ground, now is the time to do so.*

As daylight hours increase and soil temperatures rise, grass growth rates are expected to accelerate significantly in April. If you haven't already closed off your silage ground, now is the time to do so – continuing to graze it will delay your first silage cut into June, impacting both quality and the start of the second-cut growth phase.

With higher stocking rates on your grazing land, it is crucial to stay on top of your fertiliser plan to ensure sufficient grass growth. Throughout the month, regularly monitor

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grazing days ahead of stock, ideally maintaining 18-20 days' worth for most farms. If this number becomes excessive, consider skipping heavier covers and incorporating them into your main silage cut. Where weather permits, graze swards down tightly (leaving 4-5cm behind) to promote high-quality leaf growth in subsequent rotations.

## **Don't forget about sulphur!**

Sulphur (S) is an important nutrient that helps grass to grow, and improves how well it uses nitrogen (N). If there isn't enough S, the grass won't use N efficiently, which can lower the yield. In the past, grass got plenty of S from the air because factories and household fires released a lot of smoke. However, due to stricter environmental rules and better filters on industrial chimneys, this natural source of S has greatly decreased. Unlike other nutrients, there is no soil test to check S levels. S, like N, is easily leached, especially in sandy, well-drained soils with low organic matter. In contrast, heavier, wetter soils

with more organic matter hold onto S better, making it available for plant growth.

For best results, apply S in small amounts throughout the growing season:

- grazing fields: start in early spring and apply 20kg per hectare (16 units per acre) per year; and,
- silage fields: apply 20kg per hectare (16 units per acre) per cut for lighter soils – heavier soils still need sulphur but at a lower rate of 10-12 units per acre per cut.

It is important to have the right balance of nutrients. Too much S can reduce how well animals absorb important minerals like selenium and copper. So, don't overuse S – if you are unsure, play it safe and test your grass.

S is available in many fertilisers, from straight N products to mixed blends. It's not expensive to include when buying fertiliser, but be sure to check the percentage of S in the mix so that you know how much you are applying.

## Weaning calves off milk replacer

Calves purchased in recent months will soon reach the weaning stage on many farms. Ensuring a smooth transition from milk replacer to a fully solid diet is crucial for maintaining growth and preparing calves for turnout.

- Wean based on weight and concentrate intake, not age. Calves are typically weaned between six and 10 weeks, depending on the feeding strategy.
- Gradually reduce milk intake over seven to 10 days. If calves are on twice-daily milk feeds, transition them to once-daily before fully weaning.
- Ensure sufficient solid feed intake.

Calves should consume at least 1kg of calf starter per day for three consecutive days before stopping milk.

- Monitor intake and adjust weaning accordingly. Track starter consumption to identify calves that need more time to meet growth targets.
- Minimise stress during weaning. Avoid procedures like dehorning or vaccinations during this period to support a smooth transition.

By following these guidelines, calves can be weaned effectively, ensuring continued growth and a strong start to grass-based feeding.

## ICBF Mart Tracker: a smarter way to buy livestock

The ICBF Mart Tracker is a new online tool designed to help farmers easily find animals for sale at marts each day. When an animal is entered for sale, its passport (blue card) is scanned at intake, and its details are transferred to the ICBF. If genetic index data – such as Euro-Star ratings or CBV – is available, it is linked to the animal's profile. Once scanned, the ICBF records the animal as available for sale at that specific mart. Farmers can access the Mart Tracker from their phone or computer to check the number of animals for sale at their local mart and filter results based on their specific criteria. The tool also provides lot numbers, allowing farmers to go directly to the relevant pens upon arrival. Most importantly, if no



You can use the ICBF Mart Tracker to find the animals you want to buy.

suitable animals are available on a given day, farmers can avoid unnecessary trips to the mart or time spent watching online auctions, making the buying process more efficient and convenient.

## BRD housing project update

Dr John Donlon of Teagasc, Grange, is studying the quality of air in calf housing.

Bovine respiratory disease (BRD) presents a significant challenge to maintaining the health, welfare and productivity of dairy-beef calves. The air in calf housing contains irritants to the respiratory tract, which may predispose calves to BRD. Housing air is also thought to be a vector for pathogens that cause BRD. As part of this project, we are monitoring the air in 10 sheds used to rear dairy calf to beef. Five of these are purpose-built calf accommodation with the other five being repurposed calf accommodation. In each shed we are monitoring the levels of dust, ammonia, and volatile organic compounds, as well as temperature and humidity. We are also taking air samples, which will be sequenced to identify any respiratory pathogens present. This data will be



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used in conjunction with calf health data gathered from thoracic ultrasounds to understand what the major drivers of shed air quality are and BRD in Irish calf housing.

## RESEARCH UPDATE

## Safe fertiliser spreading

Check your tractor and machine before spreading fertiliser. Ensure that PTO guards are in place and secure. Lifting equipment for large fertiliser bags must be in good condition. Use long-handled knives to open bags, stay clear, and always lower equipment when it is not in use. Drive carefully at all times, especially in the farmyard. If you must travel on slopes, carefully assess the risk of overturning. Stay vigilant.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY