

BEEF

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Springtime slurry applications

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Testing helps you figure out the right amount of slurry to apply to your fields.

Slurry is a cost-effective fertiliser for growing grass on beef farms, helping to reduce the high costs of chemical fertilisers. It provides essential nutrients like nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) that grass needs to grow. When applied in the spring using low-emission slurry spreading (LESS), slurry can supply eight units of N, five units of P, and 25 units of K per 1,000 gallons. N content within slurry is at its peak in the springtime and begins to decline the longer slurry is stored in



**MOST RECENT
SOIL TEST
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tanks. The nutrient value of slurry can vary depending on the animals' diet and the dry matter content. To know exactly what's in your slurry, you can test it using a slurry hydrometer or send a sample to a lab.

Testing helps you figure out the right amount of slurry to apply to your fields. LESS is better than splash plate spreading because it reduces contamination and N losses to the atmosphere, and helps the

slurry get into the soil more effectively. It can be used on grass covers up to 1,000kg DM/ha. Slurry works well this time of year on soils with low P and K levels, so check your soil fertility maps for paddocks that need it most.

From January 1, 2025, it is mandatory that farms stocked above 100kg N/ha apply slurry through LESS. This can be checked on your agfood.ie account or alternatively contact your advisor.

Benefits of lime

Put lime on your fertiliser shopping list in 2025. The most recent soil test results show that 65% of drystock farms have a lime requirement. Correcting soil pH to the optimum pH 6.3 on mineral soils will release ~30kg N/ha and ~6kg P/ha, which will reduce fertiliser bills by €50/ha/year. In addition maintaining optimum soil pH, lime will increase grass production by 1t DM/ha/year.



Every €1 invested in lime returns €3 in extra grass production annually.

This equates to an extra five round bales of grass silage/ha/year. Every €1 invested in lime returns €3 in extra grass production annually.

SCEP reference for 2025

The Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme (SCEP) allows adjustments to your yearly reference number. If you reduced your 2024 figure by up to 20%, you might want to increase it for 2025. To make changes, log into agfood.ie, go to 'Agschemes – Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme', and update your reference value before February 12. An adjustment will directly impact your payment and compliance requirements, including the 50% calving rule, minimum

80% forage area, and maximum payable area (MPA). It will also alter the number of calves required for genotyping, those from eligible sires, and cow/calf pairs needed for weighing.

Before finalising changes, consult your advisor to understand the potential effects on your farm's eligibility and payments under the Programme. Thoughtful planning ensures compliance and maximises the benefits of the SCEP.

Data on calving times

NOELEEN BRERETON, MARK MCGEE, PETER DOYLE and BERNADETTE EARLEY of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath report on the calving times of suckler cows over a 16-year period.

At Teagasc Grange, the calving times of 1,535 spring-calving suckler cows were recorded over 16 individual herd-years. The suckler cows were accommodated indoors each year and generally offered moderate DMD grass silage *ad libitum* (straw included occasionally) with a mineral and vitamin supplement daily pre partum. Feeding generally took place in the morning. One to seven days before calving the cows were moved into individual straw-bedded pens to calve.

Calving times were recorded hourly over the '24-hour' day. Mean hourly percentage (%) of calvings ranged from 2.7 to 5.3, with large variation evident within hours. When categorised according to springtime 'daylight' (8.00am-4.00pm) and 'darkness' (4.00pm-8.00am) hours, the mean hourly percentage of calvings was 4.1 and 4.4, respectively, corresponding to a distribution of 65% and 35% for those time periods. When the daily calving pattern was divided equally into three eight-hour periods: 'night' (11.00pm-7.00am); 'morning-day' (7.00am-3.00pm); and, 'evening-day' (3.00pm-11.00pm), the mean distribution of calving times was 33%, 35% and 32%, respectively, albeit with large variation within each period (21-46%, 27-

RESEARCH UPDATE



The time of calving for spring-calving suckler cows was relatively evenly distributed throughout the 24-hour day.

46% and 22-46%, respectively) across the herd-years.

Cow breed type, calf sex, calf birth weight and calving difficulty did not appreciably influence the distribution of calving.

Assisted and unassisted calvings were also evenly distributed throughout the day. It was concluded that, on average, the time of calving for spring-calving suckler cows was relatively evenly distributed throughout the 24-hour day, albeit large variation is evident across individual herd-years. Farmers managing suckler cows should be prepared for calving at any time and maintain regular checks, especially as the calving season draws near.

Slurry and calving/ lambing safety

HEALTH AND SAFETY

With slurry, evacuate all animals and ventilate before you agitate. Select a breezy day and open all doors and outlets to provide a draught.

Keep people away from the shed and agitation point for at least 40 minutes after starting. Keep the tank opening secure at all times. Beware of gas in buildings that are linked by tanks or drainage channels.

Keep safe during calving and lambing.

Use calving/lambing gates and pens.

Keep a physical barrier between you and a calving cow at all times.



Take extra care around cows with calves.

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