

BEEF

March 2025

Grassland management



Make sure you have a grazing plan and monitor progress.

With longer days and improving ground conditions, March is a crucial time to maximise grass in the diet. The key focus should be on the following:

Paddock management and fertiliser use

Rotation plan: have a grazing plan and monitor progress. Target 60% grazed by St Patrick's Day and 100% by April 10 (or two weeks later on heavier farms).

Paddock choice: graze one-third of grazing ground before moving to silage land. On dry farms, aim to graze silage ground by St Patrick's Day before closing it, while on heavier farms, close by April 1.

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TARGET

60%

grazed by St Patrick's
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heavier farms).

Fertiliser use: in order to maximise spring grass growth, our recommendation is to have 50-60kg nitrogen (N)/ha (40-48 units N/acre) applied by mid March on dry fields and by April 1 on heavier land. This is ideally a split application of protected urea in mid February, followed by 1.5 bags of 18-6-12+S per acre by mid March. However, if weather has delayed the first application until March, apply the 1.5 bags of 18-6-12+S per acre instead of straight N as the phosphorous (P) will boost growth. Follow three weeks later with 18-23 units of N per acre as protected urea.

Before spreading any fertiliser check your nutrient management plan to ensure you have a P allowance.

Slurry application: prioritise slurry for silage ground, as research shows it increases dry matter yield by over one tonne per ha more than chemical fertilisers. Follow buffer zone and rainfall guidelines before spreading.

Soil testing: if not done already, take soil samples from fields that have received no chemical or organic P or potassium (K) to tailor fertiliser applications and maximise nutrient efficiency.

New nitrates rules for 2025

From January 1, 2025, the maximum chemical N application for grassland on farms stocked above 170kg N/ha has been reduced. From January 1, 2025, farms stocked above 100kg N/ha must use low-emission slurry spreading (LESS) equipment, like trailing shoe or dribble bar systems.

From January 1, 2025, if you export organic fertiliser it must be recorded online on agfood.ie within four days.

During grazing season (April 15-September 30), the crude protein (CP) limit in concentrates for grazing livestock is 14%. Consult your advisor to ensure compliance with fertiliser limits and other regulations.

Herd health

A proactive health plan is key to keeping cattle thriving. Focus on the following:

Grass tetany prevention: avoid grazing cows on pastures that have had heavy slurry applications or high-K fertilisers. Supplement cows with magnesium (Mg), avoid lush grass, provide fibre (silage or hay), and manage stress.

Vaccination: calves and yearlings: vaccinate against clostridial diseases and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) before turnout.



Have a herd health plan to maximise thrive.

Cows and heifers: vaccinate pre breeding for leptospirosis and/or salmonella. If mineral deficiencies exist, administer boluses one month before breeding.

Consult your vet for tailored recommendations.

Safety at calving and lambing

Almost one-third (32%) of farm fatalities involving livestock are from cows with calves, and over 50% of non-fatal farm injuries are associated with livestock.

Good facilities and good underfoot non-slip conditions are all essential requirements. Always keep a strong gate between you and the freshly calved cow/heifer, particularly when handling, treating or removing



Prioritise safety during the calving period.

the calf.

The lambing and calving period can be demanding on the body. Avoid heavy lifting and awkward postures. Use gates, pens and lifting aids, and always seek help when needed.

For more information, scan the QR code.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Calving and calf management

With spring calving now in full swing there is a rise in disease pressure. Hygiene and good management are crucial for minimising losses and ensuring strong calves.

Colostrum: newborns need 2L of first milk within two hours. Use a refractometer to test quality; top-quality colostrum reads >22%. If it's less, substitute with better-quality colostrum from a mature cow. Ensure colostrum is clean, stored in a fridge or frozen, and

use only sanitised feeding equipment to avoid infection.

Health and hygiene: keep pens clean, disinfect between cows, and provide dry bedding. Watch for scour and pneumonia. Act fast if you notice either.

Scour management: isolate sick calves to reduce spread of disease, provide electrolytes, continue milk feeding, and seek vet advice if needed.

Creep feeding: start creep feeding for autumn-born calves to ease weaning.

Teaser or new stock bull

Now is the time to plan for your teaser bull or stock bull (if you have not already).

Teaser bull: for late-April breeding, the bull should be operated on immediately. This is a vet-only procedure. It takes four to six weeks

for viable sperm to clear, two to three weeks for recovery, and the teaser bull should join the herd two to three weeks before breeding.

Stock bull: if purchasing, allow several weeks for acclimatisation. Gradually reduce concentrate feeding.

Biosecurity: isolate and test all new animals for diseases like IBR and BVD. Treat for internal and external parasites, preferably on slats to reduce the risk of introducing resistant parasites. Vaccinate per herd health plan and quarantine for four weeks before mixing with the herd.

See Future Beef factsheets by scanning the QR code.



National beef cattle performance

RESEARCH UPDATE

PAUL SMITH, MARK McGEE, BERNADETTE EARLEY, EDWARD O'RIORDAN, PAUL CROSSON and DAVID KENNY of Teagasc Grange, and ALAN KELLY (UCD) report on national beef cattle performance in 2024.

In 2024, 1.26 million prime beef cattle (steers, heifers and young bulls) were finished with an average age and carcass weight of 26.5 months (mo) and 326kg, respectively. Compared to 2023, average finishing age of steers (27.3 vs 27.6 mo), heifers (26.0 vs 26.4 mo) and young bulls (19.1 vs 19.5 mo) increased slightly.

Concurrently, average carcass weight of steers (344 vs 339kg) and heifers (305 vs 300kg), but not young bulls (~365kg), reduced. Challenging weather conditions during 2023 and early 2024 likely had a negative impact on growth rate of steers and heifers especially. Despite this, since 2010, average finishing age of Irish beef cattle has reduced by 45 days, demonstrating significant progress. Teagasc, in collaboration with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and UCD,



Age at slaughter has reduced by 45 days since 2010.

has recently commenced a large on-farm study as part of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)-funded Beef-Quest project, which is aimed at identifying the predominant animal nutrition, health and on-farm environmental factors that affect growth and subsequent finishing age of cattle on Irish commercial beef farms. Findings from this study will help develop practical and targeted measures for achieving beef cattle growth targets at a younger age.