Teagasc
Advisory
Newsletter

Dairy

July 2020

Complete a fodder budget in July

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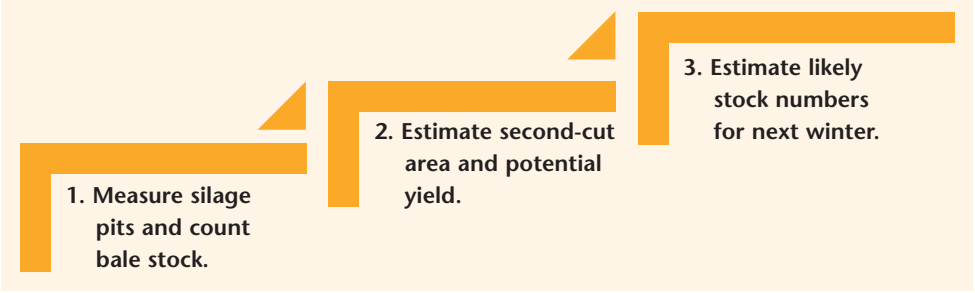
A prolonged dry spell in many parts of the country has resulted in lower than expected yields for June-cut silage. Many herds also have been grazing second-cut crops to hold grass on the farm. This could have implications for feed supply next winter. While there is plenty of time to catch up on building feed reserves, it is good practice to gauge the situation by completing a provisional winter feed budget in July. This can be done in three simple steps:

1. measure silage pits (length x width x average height in metres) plus count bale stock;
2. make an estimate of potential second cut area and yield; and,
3. estimate likely stock numbers for the coming winter.

There are simple templates available to complete calculations on PastureBase (www.pbi.ie) and also on the Teagasc website. Your advisor is available to help with calculations and to assess options. Having the numbers done early will result in better decisions made around feed purchases.



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It's never too late to milk record!

- All milk recording services are now back in action. If you didn't get started yet (due to Covid-19) and are tempted to leave it until next year…don't! It is never too late in the year to start milk recording and gathering individual cow information.
- Research has shown that milk recording will lead to a €120 increase in profit per cow, or a ten-fold return on the typical annual cost of the service. There may be a bit of work involved in milk recording, but the returns (provided you use the information generated) are well worth it.
- Use the CellCheck Farm Summary Report, provided after each recording, to make informed decisions about mastitis control in your herd.
- Track your best and worst performing cows; in 2020 it might be important to be able to identify 'passenger' cows, especially if you are tight on grass and/or winter feed.
- New regulations around dry cow therapy are expected in 2022, increasing the requirement for milk recording by more herds. Why not start in 2020, and build up valuable information before then?

Liner change

Milk liners are made from complex rubber or silicone material and have a limited useful life. The majority of rubber liners are expected to last for 2,000 milkings or six months, whichever comes first. Milk liners lose elasticity over time and this change makes them less effective at fully milking out the cow, resulting in lower milk yield and leaving the cow more vulnerable to infection. Our recommendation is that liners should be changed when they have completed 2,000 milkings.

When to pull the bull out

When would you like to be finished calving next spring? All done by May 1? If so, then the bull needs to be out by July 25. However, the decision on when to remove the bull from the herd is as often based on whether a favourite cow repeats, as it is around any plan for next year.

What about those few extra empty 'good' cows that repeat in early August? Are these now worthless? No. Empty cull cows milked on can produce 20 to 25% of their lactation after December 1 (depending on their calving date) and will also gain significant carcass weight if fed correctly, 'fattening while milking'. Finished off grass in early May, empty culls fed well and milked through the winter will probably earn at least as much as if bred to calve again in May.

Once you have sufficient replacements coming along to meet the target number of stock to calve next year, growing your herd with late-calving cows will not add to the bottom line. On the contrary, it will complicate calving, calf rearing and breeding seasons next year.

Once July begins, the countdown to the end of the breeding season has begun. For many a finish date of July 25 will result in an end of April calving season. Isn't that late enough?

RESEARCH UPDATE

Comparing supplement types in a severe drought situation

A recent study carried out at Teagasc Moorepark, led by Michael Egan, compared supplement types in a limited grass/drought situation **(Table 1)**. Cows were mid-lactation spring-calving cows. All groups received 6kg grass dry matter (DM), 5kg silage DM, plus 6kg concentrate. The feed supplement treatments investigated were:

1. parlour – 6kg high-energy 16% protein ration;
2. beet pulp – 4kg plus 2kg parlour ration;
3. soya hulls – 4kg plus 2kg parlour ration; and,
4. palm kernel – 4kg plus 2kg parlour ration.

The parlour feed group produced significantly more milk revenue than the other diets, with soya hulls being the best of the three straights options, followed by beet pulp. It is likely that the additional protein supplementation in the parlour ration contributed to extra milk solids given the low protein content of the drought-stressed grass offered. Revenue over feed cost depends on the unit cost of feed and base milk price. However, assuming a 29cpl base milk price the parlour option was most economical where parlour concentrate price was within approximately €65/tonne of the soya hulls price. Based on these results, the advice is to feed up to 6kg high-quality parlour ration (at 16% crude protein) during drought conditions. Balance the remainder of the diet with high-quality forage. High fibre straights offer an option as a third feed to complement the diet where forage supply or quality is lacking.

Table 1: Comparison of supplement types.

	Beet pulp	Soya hulls	Palm kernel	Parlour
Milk yield (kg/cow/day)	20.6	21.5	19.1	22.0
Fat (g/kg DM)	44.7	47.0	47.7	45.8
Protein (g/kg DM)	35.7	35.6	34.5	36.5
Milk solids yield (kg/cow/day)	1.62	1.74	1.59	1.77
Body weight (kg)	511.5	504.8	516.5	515.1

Five duties of an employer

With the increasing size of dairy farms, many farmers are now employing people on a part-time or full-time basis (or may be planning to do so). Marion Beecher, Teagasc Moorepark, has identified five legal requirements for an employer.

- Provide a written statement of terms and conditions of employment to each employee.
- Provide a written statement of pay or payslip with every payment of wages.
- Record each employee's working hours.
- Ensure that employees are granted, and use, their annual leave allowance.
- Adhere to the minimum wage legislation.

Further information, including template forms, are available on www.workplacerelations.ie.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Work at heights is dangerous

The risk of a fatality increases by 11 fold when working at a height. Twenty-five people died due to a fall from a height on farms in the 10-year period 2010-2019. Fifteen deaths arose from a roof fall, with six due to falling through a skylight. Careful planning is needed before accessing a height. Controls include having a secure means of access and that the work area is both sound and nonslip with edge protection. Skylights and fragile roofs, in particular, need to be identified and fall prevention measures such as crawler boards used. Further information is in the Farm Safety Risk Assessment document. Teagasc, the HSA and FBD Insurance have produced a new edition of Build in Safety, an advisory booklet for farmers, available at www.teagasc.ie.

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