

Beef

A Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

January 2012

Support for Discussion Groups

The Minister for Agriculture has provided €5 million of support for Cattle Discussion Groups in 2012.



New support for Discussion Groups

Participants who complete satisfactory attendance at discussion group meetings and carry out relevant projects in conjunction with their facilitator / adviser will receive a payment which is expected to be similar to that received by dairy farmers in the Dairy Efficiency Programme. Details of eligibility criteria, terms and conditions and payment rates are expected early in 2012.

Finishing Cattle

Indoor finishing is expensive and therefore a high rate of gain is required to cover feed and other costs. Since feed is the major cost, the relationship between feed cost and the rate of carcass gain is a key factor in determining profit margin. Since most of the animal's feed intake goes towards body maintenance, you only start to recover the cost of feed when the animal begins to

gain weight. A high rate of carcass gain is needed to minimise the proportion of feed going towards maintenance and maximise the amount available for carcass gain. For example, the daily feed cost of a 650 kg steer on high quality silage plus 5 kg concentrates is estimated at €2.12, (silage at €144 / tonne DM; meal at €235 / tonne fresh weight). At a daily liveweight gain of 1.0 kg per day and 0.66 kg carcass, the feed cost per kg of carcass gain is €3.20. If the same animal is underperforming at 0.8 kg liveweight per day, 0.52 kg carcass, then the cost per kg of carcasses gain increases to €4.08 and so when other costs are added you are likely to be in a loss-making situation.

A decrease of 0.2 kg in liveweight gain would hardly be noticed on a large animal in the absence of weighing but would delay the sale date by about a month and increase the cost of finishing by about €64 / head in feed cost alone.

Why might cattle under-perform?

Where cattle are under-forming the most likely reasons are inadequate feed intake or quality, environmental factors and health problems.



For good thrive cattle need adequate space

- Inadequate feed intake is more likely to occur with silage-based diets than with high concentrate diets and is also less easy to detect with silage-based diets. It could be due to some problems with the silage itself such as low digestibility, and poor preservation or with the feeding system such as insufficient feed space or irregular feeding, leading to lack of feed for a period or too much put out at a time, leading to stale silage and heating due to prolonged exposure to air. Only high quality leafy silage (73% DMD or better) should be fed to finishing cattle. If this is not available, consider an alternative such as an ad lib concentrate diet..

Finishing cattle on silage and concentrates should consume about 1.8% of their body weight as dry matter daily if fed a silage with high intake characteristics and 5-6 kg meal. Therefore, a finishing steer of 650 kg getting 5 kg meal should consume about 6.5 kg silage dry matter (32.5 kg silage of 20% DM).

- The main intake problems that occur on ad lib concentrate diets are acidosis (over-eating sickness) where the build-up to high concentrates is too fast or where animals are



Don't let cattle get hungry when on ad lib diets

allowed get hungry and then over-consume a high starch diet. Make sure cattle do not run out of feed, provide adequate roughage (a long, high fibre roughage is best) and keep a supply of fresh, clean water available. Sometimes cattle will reduce meal intake when put on a new batch or if the formulation changes. Choose a good high energy concentrate and do not change the formulation, especially in the final 60 days before slaughter.

- The main environmental factors that affect performance are lying area, feed space and ventilation. Finishing cattle of 600 kg – 700 kg need a minimum of 2.3m² (25ft²) lying area and at least 600 mm (2ft) trough space if all animals need to feed at the same time.
- High performing cattle produce excess heat which has to be taken away in ventilation. Signs of poor ventilation are excessive condensation on the roof and other surfaces, mould growth on timbers, wet coats on cattle and excessively dirty hides. Sweating and a raised breathing rate also indicate that ventilation is inadequate. Usually some simple structural changes to the side walls and roof is enough to rectify the problem.

Clipping a 100mm (4") strip of hair along the backbone and all hair off the tails keeps cattle dryer and cleaner.

- The most common health problems are respiratory infections, parasites and lameness. Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR) has been the most serious cause of respiratory disease in recent years. The greatest risk is after housing, so the problem

should be less common at this stage.

Vaccination, combined with good ventilation and bio-security, is recommended where there has been outbreaks in the past. All cattle, including adult cattle, are likely to require a fluke treatment. Where individual cattle are not thriving and scouring, consider sending faecal samples to the Regional Vet Laboratory for testing for the presence of rumen fluke.

When treating for lice, treat all animals in the house at the same time.

- Lameness can result from injuries caused by uneven or chipped slats; hurts caused by fighting and mounting; infections and prolonged feeding on high concentrate diets. Remove lame animals when noticed, treat according to veterinary advice and bed on straw until the problem has cleared.

Three Tasks for January

- 1. eProfit Monitor** – the completion of 2011 Profit Monitors has been prioritised by advisers in January. Get the records together so that the analysis is available early in the New Year to help you make better planning decisions.
- 2. Have you considered joining the Voluntary BVD Eradication Scheme?** Special tags to take tissue samples are available from Mullinahone Co-op and can be ordered with the regular tags. Get the supply of tags before cows start calving and tag calves within 7 days of birth. The scheme will become compulsory next year so why not get in early to identify any carrier calves (P.I.'s) and improve the health status of your herd. For more information, contact Teagasc and see the AHI website: www.animalhealthireland.ie

3. Soil testing - January is a month to take soil samples before fertilizer is applied. There is concern that P & K levels are falling and may

be limiting crop yield on many farms. Well stocked farms should take soil samples from each field every 5 years

Health and safety Message

'I am the lucky one' – that's the slogan for the current hard-hitting HSA Farm Safety Campaign in the farming media. The campaign graphically depicts the consequences of a farm injury. January is a high risk month where 10% of the annual fatalities occur. The causes are being struck, crushed or entangled by farm vehicles or machines (34%), drowning or asphyxiation (19%), animal related (19%) along with tree felling and collapsing objects (12%) each and electrocution (3%). Almost 40% of victims were over 65 years of age.



Give your health and safety first priority in 2012.

Research Update

Finishing Suckled Bull Weanlings

E. O'Riordan, Teagasc, Grange

Eight month old weanling bulls, starting at 370 kg in live weight in November were fed either 1) ad libitum concentrates plus 1.5 kg grass silage dry matter daily until slaughter, or 2) fed grass silage ad libitum plus 1.5 kg concentrate daily for 120 days, then offered ad libitum concentrates until slaughter, or 3) fed grass silage ad libitum plus 1.5 kg concentrate daily for 120 days, followed by 100 days grazing and then offered ad libitum concentrates until slaughter. Bulls were taken to three slaughter weight (670, 720 or 790 kg, resulting in carcass weights of ~ 370, 410 and 460 kg) on each systems.

Bulls were 15 – 20 months of age at slaughter, being almost 2 and 3 months older at slaughter when they were stored or went to grass, respectively. During the final finishing phase, bulls on system 1 (above) had a daily gain of 1.6 kg/day, bulls on system 2 1.8 kg/day and on system 3 1.7 kg/day. Carcasses produced had adequate level of fatness (>2+) and were, thus, suitable for the marketplace. The choice of system will be largely determined by production economics. Greatest margin/head were seen on the system 3 involving grazed grass as part of the finishing diet.

For further information on any issues raised in this newsletter, or to access other enterprise newsletters, please contact your local Teagasc Advisor or see www.teagasc.ie.