

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 14th May 2021

Replacement Heifers

Recent Teagasc research has shown that nutrition in early pregnancy is critical to prevent early embryo loss in replacement heifers. The trial examined the effects of short-term changes in energy intake on embryo survival before and breeding. This research confirmed that keeping the diet constant or even increasing the level of nutrition resulted in high embryo survival rates in replacement heifers. The research also showed that short-term reductions in energy intake after breeding severely reduces embryo survival rate in heifers. Therefore, to improve pregnancy rates in heifers, maintain dry matter intakes during the early pregnancy period by avoiding sudden grass shortages. If you are short of grass in the current climate, you will need to feed meals and/or silage to make sure that their diet and energy intake is constant.

Breeding Targets 3 Weeks into the Breeding Season

Check your breeding records to see what percentage of cows and heifers have been bred – targeting 90% of cows and 100% of heifers. Pick out cows that are 35 days calved and have not been bred. Call vet to scan these cows and treat accordingly. Any cow that is suitable for breeding should be put on a fixed time A.I. synchronisation programme. Keep tail paint topped up because it becomes harder to pick up cows in heat later in the breeding season

Farm Safety

The month of May is a high-risk month as silage cutting kicks off from the middle of the month. The safety of yourself, your family, those working for you and other road users must be your highest priority to avoid serious injuries during this busy time. Put a safety plan in place before silage starts.

Grass Update

Despite the continuing harsh conditions and below average growth rates, Average Farm Covers (AFC) are holding across the country. The extra feeding going in to cows is holding grass covers up on average. However, regrowths are very poor on grazed paddocks. PastureBase data tells us that 95% of farmers have an AFC over 500 Kg DM/Ha and 82% have an AFC of over 600 Kg DM/Ha. The key messages are the same this week to continue to walk the farm every 5 days. If the cover is less than 550 kg DM/ha, it is critical to hold feeding levels until grass growth matches demand. Keep your rotation to a 20-22-day round and target a pre-grazing cover of 1,200 Kg DM/Ha or higher.

Nitrogen & Sulphur Application

The amount of nitrogen fertiliser for grazing will depend the stocking rate on the farm. So based on your stocking rate, apply between 23-30 units of N fertiliser per acre (29-38kg N/ha) every three to four weeks across the main grazing season. Err on the low side, aim to reduce chemical N by 3 units per acre with each application. You can potentially save the equivalent of a bag of CAN per acre by doing this. A 'little and often' approach during the main growing season gives the most efficient response in terms of grass growth. Use protected urea where straight N or N + Sulphur is being used. Sulphur is an important nutrient for grassland soils to increase nitrogen uptake. On sulphur deficient soils, apply 20 kg/ha per year for grazed swards.

Sheep

Keeping on top of parasite infections is critical for flock health and the performance of lambs at grass. A recent Nematodirus forecast suggests that larval hatching peaked in the south-west in late March/early April. Therefore, the time is there to treat lambs with an oral drench if not already done. Lambs born in early March or before should have been treated in late April. In later lambing flocks, treat lambs at five to six weeks of age once they are eating sufficient quantities of grass to ingest the

infective larvae. If lambs are still scouring after dosing for Nematodirus, you may need to consider treating them for coccidial infection. Contact your vet for advice. Take the opportunity to foot bathe all sheep in the flock when they are in for dosing the lambs. Use a 10% zinc or copper sulphate solution. If done well, foot bathing is very effective in the treatment and prevention of scald in lambs. Lameness in lambs can cause a major setback in animal performance as well as being an animal welfare issue.

