

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 19th November 2021

Is your Farm Winter Ready!

After a fine Summer and Autumn, inclement weather in certain parts over recent weeks, has led to cattle being housed earlier than expected.

Some farmers have been lucky to be still grazing but will be housing in the coming weeks.

Winter housing is a costly time on farms, but the weight gains made over the winter period can have a huge influence on the bottom line. Farmers should have a plan in place and here are a few key points when it comes to managing stock and the farmyard.

Preparing Housing

Examine all feed barriers, slats and water troughs and internal gates, general maintenance will ensure good working condition allowing a smooth transition from grazing to housing.

Farmers should also pay careful consideration to the size of the shed available, as overcrowding can lead to a significant reduction in animal performance and increase costs as the table shows:

Concentrate Supplementation and Silage Quality			
Silage Quality	66DMD	70 DMD	74DMD
Finishing cattle target- 1Kg ADG	7 Kg	5.5kg	4kg
Cost over 100 days at €310/t Concentrate	€217	€171	€124
Store cattle target 0.6kgs ADG	2Kg	1.25 Kg	0.5Kg
Cost over 100 days at €310/t Concentrate	€62	€39	€16
Weanlings cattle target 0.6kgs ADG	3Kg	2 Kg	1Kg
Cost over 100 days at €310/t Concentrate	€93	€62	€31

Lying and Feed Space

Suckler cows housed in slatted houses require 2.5-3.0m²/cow, while cattle weighing **over 275kg** require 2.0-2.5m²/animal. Weanlings or cattle weighing **under 275kg** are required to have 1.2-1.5m²/animal. Lighter animals (under 275kg), that are housed in straw-bedded sheds, require 2.4-3.0m²/animal; heavier cattle (over 275kg) need 4.0m²/head.

In order to get the most live-weight gain from your cattle, over the winter months, it is advisable to group animals in accordance with weight. This

will reduce bullying where lighter stock compete with heavier stock at the feed face.

Feedstuff	Recommended feed space allowances (mm/head)			
	Suckler cows	Finishing cattle	Light store cattle	Weanlings
Ad-lib roughage	400-500	400-500	250-300	225-300
Restricted roughage	600-700	600-650	500-600	400-500
Concentrates	600-700	600-650	500-600	400-500

Research has shown that animals perform better in well-ventilated sheds, as they are less like to develop respiratory infections or pneumonia.

Animals may not always show signs of pneumonia. However, suspect animals should have their temperature recorded and treated accordingly if needs be.

The air outlet in sheds should be double the inlet.

Inlet: 0.1m²/animal

Outlet: 0.2m²/animal

Allowing weanlings or autumn-born calves to venture outdoors for a period will also help to reduce the risk of pneumonia. Simple modification can make a big difference and avoid draughts. Clipping the back of cattle will help stop cattle overheating and will keep animals cooler, especially in sheds that are heavily stocked. It will also help control lice infestations.

Now that the clocks have gone back, the evening feed is usually under light and now is a good time to complete a Health and safety check of the Housing, Machinery and Yard.

Housing – Check the lights in each shed are working and have bulbs spare just in case. Check the shed doors, gates and barriers can be safely opened and closed.

Machinery – A serviced tractor and other machinery will give peace of mind and reduce the risk of a non start some morning. Ensure you have safety guards on all pto`s from your own point of view and those that help on the farm. A clean out of the tractor cab and checking the bulbs are in working order will lead to a safer yard.

Yard- A well lit yard cannot be overstated as what you can't see you can't avoid. Keeping the yard tidy and clear will make it safer for everyone – young and old.

A Pest control plan, sanitation facilities and locked medicine/chemical store over the winter will reduce the risks for everyone working on farms this winter. However our own head space is just as important, so look after yourself.

