

Teagasc Notes for the week ending Friday 11th August 2017

Cattle

Preparing weanlings for sale

Introduce concentrates two months before you plan to sell your calves. The response to meal feeding in weanlings is 6:1, as opposed to 12:1 in two-year-old cattle. Financially, creep feeding has proven to be economically viable and the best chance of recovering the cost of meal is when it is fed to young weanlings that can convert it quickly into live weight gain. Many farmers put in place a creep gate where calves have access to a trough and you have control over the amount of meal fed per calf.

Another option is to raise a short distance of electric wire and allow calves to forward graze better quality grass ahead of cows and feed concentrate in troughs. Either way calves should have access to top quality grass, start on 0.5kg of concentrate per day and build up to the rates below.

- well-muscled bulls suitable for export: 2-3.5kg/day;
- other continental bull weanlings: 1.5-2.5kg/day;
- heifer weanlings suitable for export: 2.5kg/day; and,
- other continental heifer weanlings: 1.5kg/day.

A simple three-way mix ration with crude protein of 16% is adequate and where grass quality is good, feed at the lower levels stated. Bull calves have the potential to achieve 1.4kg/day and heifers will achieve 1.3kg/day assuming good grass quality.

Calves should be treated for lungworm prior to weaning as the stress could lead to problems when not treated. Weaning should be carried out gradually by removing a small number of cows from the field/herd every two to three days. Weigh your stock and check out the local mart to know their value. Calves weaned weeks before sale should be housed on straw the night before sale and if possible have access to hay. This is to prevent calves coming fresh off grass the morning of the sale. Calves should be clean, well presented and grouped for sale by weight. Remember the trade can vary week to week so diversify and don't bring all your calves on the same day.

Finishing cattle off grass

Finishing cattle need to be kept performing at a minimum of 1kg live weight per day and as they move into the final finishing phase they require a diet of increasing energy. Grass alone in the autumn cannot provide the energy to give a live weight gain of over 0.8kg per day. This means even in the best conditions, meal is needed to get the live weight gain up to 1kg/day or slightly better. Therefore with good quality grass, feed at least 3kg of meal a day and where supply is limited or quality is less than excellent you should go to 6kg/day. Once you have to go above 6kg per day it may be as well to go indoors on an ad libitum concentrate diet. Autumn grass has excess protein in the order of 22% and therefore meal does not need to be high in protein. In fact high-energy, low-protein concentrates are the ideal supplement for autumn grass.

Extending the grazing season starts now

You must put a simple plan in place now to have good quality grass available in October. Under Nitrates regulations, nitrogen cannot be spread after September 15. In any case, response to nitrogen declines rapidly in September. On heavily stocked farms continue spreading nitrogen as paddocks are grazed out until the end of August. This will ensure high quality grass into mid-October. Even though you currently may have 20 days grass ahead, which is fine for now, keep spreading nitrogen as the length of rotation will increase to 35 days from mid-September. From mid-August, do not take out heavy covers as bales. Try to get these grazed out in the rotation and spread nitrogen afterwards. Lime is a first step in tackling soil fertility on all drystock farms and Irish farmers tend to spread lime in the autumn. Teagasc Johnstown Castle has an excellent fact sheet called 'Advice on Liming'. This explains the different types of lime, how much to spread and the benefits of spreading lime. This fact sheet can be downloaded at www.teagasc.ie.

Autumn fertiliser

The amount of nitrogen spread in August/early September will determine how much grass you have for the last three rotations. How much grass you need to grow to extend the rotation length will depend on your farms stocking rate. Farms with a low stocking rate may need to spread very little nitrogen at this time of the year. Remember from late August soils naturally release their own organic nitrogen and this may be enough. On heavier stocked farms consider applying a blanket application of nitrogen. The amount to apply will depend on how much of your full years allowance you have left and the overall grass supply on the farm. Swards with more perennial ryegrass will respond better to nitrogen and these should be targeted for building autumn grass.

Slurry spread in the autumn in warmer and drier weather can deliver very little nitrogen that the sward will use but it is still very valuable when it comes to its phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) content (about five units of P and 38 units of K per 1,000 gallons cattle slurry). The key issue with slurry at any time of the year is to spread it on fields that need P and K. Ask yourself: "If I were not in the field today spreading slurry, would I have been here with a compound fertiliser?" If the answer is no, should you not be spreading that slurry somewhere else

Health and Safety

Nasties on Farms

There are a lot of nasty bugs hanging around farms. They can silently damage your health. Examples are:

- E coli
- Brucellosis
- Salmonella
- Weils Disease

It can often be too late to do anything when the condition is diagnosed. So what can you do now?

- Wash your hands – you will not go too far wrong with the old fashion soap and water
- Wear gloves, especially when handling risky material
- Cover cuts with plasters
- Wear overalls, this puts a solid barrier between you and the bugs.
- Routine dosing and injecting will also reduce the levels of certain diseases like Leptospirosis.