

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday August 9th 2019

Calves at Grass

Maximising weight for age in calves should remain a vital priority in the months leading up to housing as the greater the housing weight the reduced pressure on meeting growth targets during the winter period. A number of areas dictate this, namely:

- Grassland management
- Parasite control
- Concentrates



Whether or not meals should be fed from August onwards is dependant on the standard of grassland management on the farm. If calves are getting a constant supply of leafy grass 8-10cm in height (1000-1400 kg DM/Ha) and weather conditions are good, then meals can be cut out for these months. If however they are being forced to graze poorer-quality swards and/or the weather is unfavourable (especially wet weather) then there is a benefit in feeding a small amount of concentrates daily. Feeding over 1.0kg per day to calves is not only costly but also reduces their grass intake, which then makes grassland management even more challenging as they are longer grazing down paddocks.

Stomach worms and hoose need to be kept to a minimum in young calves in their first year at grass. Calves have no immunity built up to them and they can dramatically reduce their daily performance if treatment for them is delayed. However, recent studies have shown that there is a resistance building in stomach worms to the different wormers that are on the market. Essentially, this means that they are not as effective at killing these parasites as they used to be and if we are not careful they may be of no use to us in years to come if their efficacy continues to decline. One of the key steps to slowing down the problem of resistance to wormers is to only use them when they are needed. Pooled fresh dung samples taken from a batch of calves can be sent to a laboratory and for a very small fee they can quickly tell you whether or not the calves need to be dosed for stomach worms.

This is now considered best practice rather than treating calves based on the number of weeks they are at grass. Treating for hoose is different. Once calves start showing the signs of hoose, i.e. coughing after running, they should be treated immediately with an appropriate wormer.



Weaning Lambs

Weaning of lambs on the lowland flocks is well under way with most of the flocks have weaned lambs by July at approximately 14 weeks of age. Once weaned, lambs should graze to a residual of 5.5-6cm on grazing paddocks followed by dry ewes used to remove the remainder down to a residual of 4cm. Many farms have begun selling lambs, the majority of lambs fit so far mainly being singles and pet lambs finished indoors. Regular weighing of lambs should remain priority, handling for fat cover should remain an essential part of

each sheep farmer's routine as there is a very limited market for very heavy lambs and allowing lambs to go overweight makes no economic sense. A well fleshed lamb of 45 or 46kgs live weight should hit the target 21kg dead weight carcass at this time of year.

Kill out rates for lambs vary with age, breed, sex, diet offered. Keeping a note of your liveweights pre slaughter is very useful in calculating kill out % after you receive your returns from the factory. You should use this information to decide on your target liveweight for drafting and select within a 4 to 5kg weight range while always ensuring lambs are handled well.



Prepare Ewes for Breeding

Don't allow ewes to lose too much condition after weaning as this is not a positive thing. Pick out thin ewes and run them on better grass so that they can gain condition. Thin ewes may need up to 12 weeks of preferential feeding to pick up enough body condition and remember the clock is ticking. July/ August are the months to start thinking about vaccinating ewes for toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion if these form part of your flock health plan.

All the evidence shows that using high-index performance-recorded (star rated) rams increases farm profitability and reduces labour associated with difficult lambing and reduced mortality. Purchasing rams that are not performance recorded is a shot in the dark.

