

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday June 28th 2019

Do Your Fodder Budget

We all need to get into the habit of doing a fodder budget on an annual basis, not just in the bad years. After 1st cut is as good a time as any to do the budget to establish what you need for a normal winter and what you have in the yard. A new winter feed budgeting tool in Pasturebase, to be launched at the Moorepark Open Day on the 3rd July, is to be welcomed to allow you to do the budget.

Building Fodder Reserve for the Bad Years

Doing the budget for the normal winter is important but equally important is a provision needed on all farms to insulate against poor growth conditions within year. The cumulative effect of weather events in 2018 was a grass growth reduction of almost 3.0 t DM/ha in the worst affected regions. This is an estimated 1 t DM deficit/cow, which is instructive as to potential scale of reserves required for future events. A practical guideline would be to carry at least 50-80% of this figure (500-800 kg DM/cow) as feed surplus above the normal stocks needed to balance the system.

This would be built up over time and vary with degree of risk per farm. Some key considerations are:

- Increasing forage grown per ha currently farmed is usually the cheapest means of building forage reserves. This is a priority and the obvious option for most people that are not optimising grass growth on the farm.
- Typical market cost of purchased forage options is €150-210/ t DM for grass silage, wholecrop and maize silage
- Yield variation has a huge effect on unit feed cost. Buy single-cut crops on a DM yield rather than per ha basis
- Forage reserves by definition will be fed to fill pasture deficits - 100% of stocks should be of high feed quality
- Feed quality (energy, protein, and digestibility) varies greatly within crop types - set minimum criteria before purchase
- Seek to establish feed reserves in good growth years. This has the dual benefit of better quality crops and reduced market cost
- Good facilities are essential for longer term forage storage

Establishing feed reserves does not come cheap. At recommended volumes and moderate costs of change €160-180/t DM, herds would need to invest €80-120/cow for no increase in milk revenue. However unlike purchased feed utilised within-year, the reserve is retained as inventory and so is largely profit-neutral. Finally, the cost of building a feed reserve highlights a need to closely examine the economics of increasing herd scale based on conserved forage and concentrates.

Dairy Start-Up Courses

Teagasc are plan to run a new Dairy Start up course in the region, subject to numbers interested.

This Dairy Start-Up Course has been designed to help you decide whether dairy farming is right for you, while also establishing what the likely costs and returns from dairy farming would be on your farm. The course is practical and interesting, mixing both the principles for successful dairying with the practical skills required for the start-up process.

Course Content

- Cost of conversion
- Expected costs and returns

- Farmyard design
- Grazing infrastructure
- Reseeding
- Animal breeding
- Animal health & biosecurity
- Milking machine design & wash routine
- Milking routine
- Milk quality

Course Benefits

On successful completion of this course, participants will have gained valuable knowledge and skills to assist with the establishment of a successful dairy farm. This course is a must for all farmers who are considering converting to dairy farming and existing farmers who want to up skill themselves on how to improve farm profitability and lifestyle.

Course Days & Fees

There will be 4 training days in 2019 and 10 discussion group meetings in 2020. Cost is €750 per participant (€600 for Teagasc clients)

For further details contact the local office or visit www.teagasc.ie/dairystartup

Or hover the camera in your phone over the code below and the link will appear automatically.

