

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday June 7th 2019

Teagasc Notes – 31st May 2019

Are you in a dairy beef production system or interested in setting up a system? If so, you might be interested in the 10 key lessons learnt by farmers on the Teagasc Green Acres Programme as outlined at the recent Dairy Beef Event at Johnstown Castle in Wexford.

The Teagasc Green Acres Calf-to-Beef Programme was set up in 2015 to demonstrate profitable dairy calf to beef systems on a whole-farm basis through a network of ten demonstration farms that all had significant calf to beef enterprises. The primary aim of the project was to demonstrate that where a high level of technical efficiency is achieved on beef farms, it is possible to attain a net margin (excluding premia) in excess of €500/ha. The farms improved their average net margin from minus €40 to €475/ha (excluding direct payments) over the three year programme. How?

1. Have a plan

When purchasing calves, you need to have a plan as to when these animals are going to be slaughtered. If there is no plan in place then there will be implications for housing facilities, slurry storage, silage availability, mixed age groups creating issues for dosing, feeding concentrates for finishing and cash flow.

2. Producing high beef output

This is the kilograms of live weight produced per hectare. It is a combination of a high stocking rate and excellent individual animal performance; targets of 1250 kg live weight/ha should be produced. This can be achieved from a stocking rate of 2.5 LU/ha and a performance of 500 kg live weight per livestock unit. Decide on a production system and stocking rate to suit your land type and housing facilities available.

3. Excellent calf rearing

Source a good quality calf. Buying an earlier born calf (before 17 March) will help increase output. These early-born calves will be weaned and at grass for a longer period in the first grazing season. Feed high levels of milk replacer, ensure good hygiene and be consistent to avoid stressing the young animal.

4. Appropriate calf rearing facilities

Calf housing should be fit for purpose. Ensure a clean, warm, dry, well-ventilated shed for calf rearing. To ensure a dry bed, have a 1:20 slope on the floor from back to front with a channel to remove seepage to an outside tank. Provide plenty of straw to ensure that per calf. Ensure that there is no draught at calf level.

5. Animal health plan

Having a health plan in place in conjunction with your vet is essential. With calves coming from numerous sources, having a vaccination programme in place is critical. The top performing farms vaccinate for pneumonia and IBR. A strategic dosing regimen also needs to be planned to control worms, fluke, lice etc. throughout the grazing season and during housing.

6. Correct soil fertility

In order to produce high output from the system, high animal live weight gain from grazed grass is required. To ensure enough high-quality grass is available, soil fertility needs to be at its optimum. First, correct the lime status of the soil and then correct phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) levels to Index 3.

7. Grassland management

Having a paddock system in place to supply quality leafy grass at all times, thereby maximising weight gain from grass, is essential. Aim to have at least 240 days grazing in the second grazing season. To achieve this target, animals need to be turned out to pasture early in the spring. This will require excellent management in the autumn, where paddocks are closed up early to ensure a supply of grass in the spring. Good grazing management in the spring to ensure you set the farm up for maximum productivity over the summer is also critical to success.

8. Produce high-quality silage

Produce high-quality silage to ensure all animals meet the target average daily gain (ADG) of 0.6 kg/day over the first winter period. All silage produced should have a dry matter digestibility (DMD) greater than 70% to help reduce the concentrate level required to meet target daily gains. The financial difference between 62% and 72% DMD silage for 100 weanlings over a 140-day winter could be €7,000 or €70/head.

9. Regular weighing of cattle

To ensure that performance is not compromised at any stage from purchase to slaughter, it is essential that regular weighing of animals takes place throughout the year. At a minimum, animals should be weighed at turn-out to pasture, mid-season and at housing. Poor performing animals should be detected and a remedial action put in place. Animals for finishing can be grouped together, thereby increasing efficiencies as only the stock closest to target weights are fed to slaughter.

10. Review your plan regularly

Having a plan is important, but reviewing it on a regular basis is essential. Are key targets being met? If not, why not? What changes are needed to keep on target or does the plan need to change in some way?

Health & Safety Message - Fill Tyres with Care

Vehicle and machine tyre maintenance is critical for safety. Tyres should be inspected on a weekly basis for inflation pressure and damage. Use a reliable pressure gauge for inflation and always know the correct pressure. If a tyre side wall fails during inflation an explosive force is released at an angle of up to 45 degrees. Use a clip-on coupling to connect the airline to the tyre valve and also use a long hose to keep out of the explosion trajectory.

Sheep Farm Walk

Teagasc Kilkenny will have a sheep farm walk on the farm of William Hutchinson, Kells on the 7th June at 11am. The main topics of the walk include lamb thrive/grassland Management; new EID tagging + dispatch dockets and sheep health issues. In attendance on the day we will have Philip Creighton from Teagasc Athenry, James Murphy of Kilkenny IFA and a representative from the Regional Vet Laboratory in Kilkenny.

