

Teagasc Notes for the week ending Friday November 10th 2017

Grassland Farmer of the Year – Leinster Region Winner

Congratulations to Billy, Mary, Liam and Mark Heffernan, Caherleske, Dunamaggin, Co. Kilkenny who were finalists in the first ever Grassland Farmer of the Year competition and were the Leinster Region award winners. The Heffernan family have worked very closely with Teagasc adviser Michael Freaney over many years and have shared their knowledge and experience by facilitating many Teagasc walks on their farm. The Heffernans recognise the value of quality grass and are very focused on optimising the grass intake of their dairy herd to maximise profit. This award is deserved recognition for the very high standards of management being achieved on this farm.

Dairying

October grass is spring grass

November is a crucial month for Spring grass supply. If too much grass is taken off the farm during this month then there will be less grass available to graze in February and March. About two-thirds of the grass grazed in the first 40 days in Spring is grass that grew during October/early November. Therefore it is essential that the fields/paddocks closed during October are not grazed in November. The grazing targets for November are outlined in Table 1. Every farm should have an average farm cover in late November of 550kg DM/ha or higher.

Table 1: Autumn grazing targets

	November 1	Fully Housed
Stocking rate (LU/ha)	Milking platform grazed %	Closing cover (kg DM/ha)
2.5	60	550-600
3.0	60	600-650
3.5	70	700-750

Lime

Two-thirds of Irish grassland is currently deficient in lime. Low pH soils 'lock up' phosphorous (P) until lime is applied and have a lower response to nitrogen (N) fertiliser. Lime can be spread all year round but winter time is best if the weather allows you to travel on the land. Contact Teagasc to arrange soil tests which will identify your soil pH levels and provide lime recommendations.

Replacement heifer indoor diets

To reach weights for breeding next Spring, replacement heifers will need to gain 18-20kg per month over the winter housing period. This holds true even if heifers are to be turned out to grass early in Spring. An average daily gain of at least 0.6kg is needed for heifers on or above target weight at housing, and up to 0.8kg per day for those heifers falling below target. Table 2 outlines some diet guidelines to meet these targets.

How much dry matter will weanling heifers eat per day? A useful guide is about 1% of bodyweight as fibre (NDF). Better quality silage has lower fibre content so the 'fill-effect' is reduced. For example, a 220kg heifer can consume 2.20kg NDF per day. This equates to 5.0kg of a 74% dry matter digestibility (DMD) silage (44% NDF), but only 3.7kg of 66% DMD silage (58% NDF). Table 3 shows estimated meal feeding required for target weight gains on ad-lib silages at different DMD. The concentrate used has high UFL and PDI values; higher feed rates will be needed if ration quality is lower. Energy (UFL) and protein (PDI) intake drive daily gain.

To achieve such gains the following actions need to take place now:

1. Treat heifers for parasites at or shortly after housing – talk to your vet for advice.
2. Segregate light from on-target/above-target heifers. The target liveweight for November 1 is approximately 40% of pre-calving weight or 220kg for Holstein Friesian heifers.
3. Ensure that there is 0.3m (1ft) of feeding space per heifer, particularly for the lighter heifers, at all times while they are indoors or performance will be reduced.
4. Weigh heifers six weeks after housing to assess progress.

5. Plan to turn the lighter heifers out to grass in early February. Heifers will gain 1kg/day on spring grass alone, or on a combination of grass and meals if grass is scarce.

Table 2: Diet guidelines for dairy heifers (220-260kg) at different rates of daily gain

Daily gain(kg)	UFL intake	PDI intake	Dry matter intake	UFL/kg intake	PDI per kg intake
0.60	4.1	410	5.1	0.80	.79
0.80	4.7	460	5.3	0.89	86

Table 3: Guideline meal feeding levels for replacement heifers with different silages

	72% DMD		67% DMD	
Target daily gain (kg)	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8
Meal (kg/day)	0.8	1.2	1.5	2.0
Meal specification	UFL 0.97 as fed, PDIE 111, crude protein 18% (barley, beet pulp, distillers, soya, plus minerals)			

Important event

Managing the Spring Workload on Dairy Farms

A Teagasc Waterford Kilkenny farm walk on Managing the Spring Workload on Dairy Farms will take place on the Kinsella family farm, Clogga, Moncoin, Co. Kilkenny on Tuesday 14th November at 11.00am. Teagasc advisers and specialists will discuss how dairy farmers can plan for the peak workload that occurs in Spring time by organising facilities, work practices and labour. FRS and Kildalton College staff will also discuss the availability of labour and students. This is a DAFM approved Knowledge Transfer event. All are welcome. The farm will be signposted from the old Waterford to Mullinavat road, from Mooncoin church and from Kildalton College.

