

Teagasc Notes for the week ending Friday November 17th 2017

Cattle

Treating for liver fluke

When you are treating your cattle for liver fluke at housing, are you doing it correctly? If you are, they should be free of the parasite for the winter as they cannot pick more fluke up while they are indoors. If it is not done correctly, growth rates will be below where they should be and, depending on the level of infection, they may be quite a lot below target. Doing it correctly means using the right product, at the right time, using the correct dose rate and administering it the right way.

A common mistake made on some farms when it comes to treating cattle at housing for liver fluke is assuming that one treatment for liver fluke is enough to kill all of the fluke present. This may be the case but only if you do one of the following:

- a) drench cattle two weeks after housing with a product that has triclabendazole in it;
- b) if you are using a product that kills immature fluke (these are mostly injection and pour-on products) you wait for at least seven weeks after housing before you give it; or,
- c) if you are using a product that only kills mature fluke (these are mostly injection and oral drench products) you wait for at least 10 weeks after housing before you give it.

In all other situations you will have to treat cattle twice over the winter for fluke. For example, if you are using a product two weeks after housing (which is a common time to treat for stomach worms and lice) that controls immature and adult fluke, you will have to treat them again five weeks later with a similar fluke product.

Feeding to calve at two years

Only 16% of heifers in suckler herds calve between 22 and 26 months of age. This is too low a figure when you consider all the advantages compared to heifers that calve at three years of age:

- more output from the heifer over her lifetime (more calves produced);
- reduced stocking rate compared with calving heifers at older ages;
- potential to reduce the number of groups of stock on the farm; and ,reduces costs. Grange work shows, that for a 50-cow herd with a 20% replacement rate, each additional month that calving is delayed is costing the herd almost €500.

One of the main reasons why heifers are not bred to calve at two years of age is because they are too light at the start of the breeding season and they do not start bulling. Puberty in heifers is more related to weight than to age so a good plane of nutrition is important. Heifers should be 60% of their mature cow weight (weight at five years old) at the start of the breeding season, e.g., 420kg if mature cow weight is 700kg. Most spring-born heifers will need to put on 60-80kg of liveweight over their first winter so they will need good quality silage plus 1-2kg of concentrates. Many farmers feed this group of stock in their own group in a separate pen so that their winter performance can be monitored closely and their diet can be adjusted if necessary. Also if no other group of stock are turned out early to grass next spring, this is the group that should get priority over all other cattle on the farm.

Dry cow feeding

At this year's Teagasc National Beef Conference, David Kenny from Grange clearly showed that when it comes to getting spring calving suckler cows back in calf, the body condition they are in when they calve has by far the biggest influence. Feeding extra to thin cows after they calve has very little effect on shortening the length of time it takes to get them cycling again. Because of this, it is vital that cows are fed correctly during the dry period over the winter to ensure they calve down in the correct condition next spring.

Cows need to be grouped for feeding according to their body condition. Ideally, you should have three different groups:

1. Cows that are in good condition that can lose some of it between now and calving;
2. Cows that should maintain their body condition; and,
3. Cows that need to gain condition between now and calving.

How much each group is fed will depend on the quality of the forage you are feeding. Where silage is of good quality, you may be able to restrict the amount fed to varying degrees for the first two groups

of cows, which will help to save on your winter feed costs. The thin group of cows should not, however, be restricted, as they need to gain condition. If silage quality is poor, they may need to be supplemented with 1-2kg of ration. Remember also that in-calf suckler cows on a forage diet need to be supplemented with an adequate mineral and vitamin supplement over the winter. Be careful of supplements that may be priced at the low end as they may not supply enough of the essential minerals and vitamins that cows need. When you are feeding 100g per day of a supplement to a cow, that costs €200 per tonne more, but supplies everything she needs, it will only cost an extra €3 per cow over a five-month winter compared to a cheaper, less effective supplement. Your adviser can give you guidelines on what should be in an effective supplement for dry suckler cows.

Important Events

Teagasc National Dairy Conference - Kilkenny

The Teagasc National Dairy Conference will take place on Tuesday, 28 November at the Lyrath Estate Hotel, Kilkenny commencing at 9.00am. The theme of this year's conference is Seizing Opportunities for a Better Future.

Sean Molloy, Glanbia will outline both the challenges and opportunities faced by Glanbia in the marketplace and he will also present the findings from a recent Glanbia supplier survey. Workload and labour are now big issues on dairy farms. Paidi Kelly, Teagasc will outline the six key strategic actions required by the dairy industry to meet this challenge. Margaret Dorgan, Consultant will address managing labour and Phil Purcell, Kilkenny dairy farmer will discuss his labour strategies for spring 2018. The final session will provide attendees with the opportunity to hear some of the more recent results from the comprehensive research programme at Teagasc.

Book your place now at <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/dairy-conference/>. All are welcome.

Teagasc Beef Seminar - Dungarvan

A Teagasc Beef Seminar will be held in the Park Hotel, Dungarvan on Thursday, November 30th at 7.30pm. We are very lucky to have been able to engage Sean Kelly MEP to address Waterford beef farmers on Renewal of the CAP and the Future of BPS Payments. Phelim O'Neill, Farmers Journal will speak on Irish Beef Prices and Market Outlook and Brian Garry, Teagasc Nutritionist will discuss Feeding Strategies for Cattle this Winter. All are welcome.

