

Teagasc Notes for the week ending Friday September 29th 2017

Dairying

October is a very important grazing month

Decisions that you take during October will influence your closing cover, closing date and the amount of grass on your farm next spring. So it is vital that you get the last rotation right. This means starting to close off between October 1 and 10 (the earlier date for farms on heavier soils) and getting at least 60% (up to 70% on higher stocked farms) of the farm grazed by the end of the month. Every one-week delay in starting the last rotation will reduce grass supply in spring by 100kg DM/ha. All paddocks must be grazed out well so as to encourage tillering over the winter. Poaching must be avoided – back fences and off-grazing should be employed under difficult grazing conditions. Because of excellent growth during September, there is a lot of grass on farms as we head into October, so you will have to be ‘on top of your game’ to get the most from autumn grass. The tactics you used for spring grazing are equally applicable now, especially on heavier soils.

October is a key month for managing cow body condition score

Having cows in the correct body condition score (BCS) at calving is essential to ensure trouble-free calving, good milk yields and good subsequent fertility performance next year. This is much more valuable than squeezing a few extra litres from thin cows milked into December. Grouping and feeding dry cows based on BCS is not always practical. Consequently, it may be easier to meet BCS targets by management in late lactation. The sooner you put a plan in place to deal with thin cows, the more options you have. Acting in October will allow you to use the option of an extended dry period for early-calving cows.

Act early to have cows in correct BCS next spring:

- assess quality and quantity of feed available;
- record the BCS of each cow in the herd –each cow must be handled to accurately assess individual BCS;
- write down expected calving date for each cow to calculate dry period length; and,
- assign each cow to a management plan to meet target BCS at calving.

Table 1 outlines some guideline changes in BCS due to silage and management. For example, dry cows on 62% DMD silage for eight weeks would be expected to lose BCS (-0.15), while those on 68% DMD silage would gain around 0.20 BCS units. Thin cows (less than 2.5) will require extra days dry, once a day milking, extra dry period feeding, or a combination of measures to make the targets. Develop a simple cow-by-cow plan for your herd and discuss with your adviser or discussion group.

Table 1: Effect of silage quality and management options on BCS change

	Silage DMD		
Eight week dry period	62%	68%	72%
UFL intake for 0kg bodyweight gain	7.1	7.1	7.1
BCS change	-0.15	0.20	0.50
Management options for BCS	BCS Effect		
Extra six week dry period	+0.20	+0.45	+0.55
Once a day milking for seven weeks	+0.18	+0.18	0.18
2kg hulls/pulp to dry cows - 6 weeks	+0.30	+0.25	+0.20

October is an ideal time to take soil samples

A dairy farm stocked at 2.5LU/ha, producing 5,000 litres/cow (12,500 litres/ha) will remove 13kg of phosphorus (P)/ha and 19kg of potassium (K)/ha per year in milk. Our high rainfall results in between

250 and 625kg lime/ha being washed from our soils each year. So it is vital that dairy farmers check their soil pH and P and K status at least every three to five years – and more frequently on highly-stocked milking platforms. October is an ideal month to soil sample your farm. To ensure that the samples taken give you accurate information, you should:

- prepare a soil sampling map showing defined sampling areas;
- soil sample the whole farm so that you have a clear picture of the overall fertility and the areas that need priority attention. It also avoids confusion and penalties if required for nitrates derogation or other schemes.
- use a suitable soil corer capable of taking samples to 10cm depth;
- take a representative selection of soil cores (a minimum of 20 is recommended); and,
- allow three months after the last application of P and K fertiliser or slurry/manure.

Contact your local Teagasc office to arrange for a trained soil sampler to visit your farm.

Farm Safety

Unfortunately 2017 is another bad year for fatal accidents on Irish farms. There have been 16 deaths on our farms so far this year. Trying to do too much, rushing and tiredness lead to many farm accidents. TAMS II provides funding for many safety improvements on farms. Grant aid is available for livestock facilities, slurry aeration, access manholes, slat replacement, safety rails, sliding doors and electrical and lighting installations. Attendance at a half-day safety code of practice training course or completion of the Certificate in Agriculture in the last five years is a requirement to draw down TAMS II funding. Teagasc is running a half day safety course for Teagasc clients in Waterford Kilkenny every month. Phone 051898137 to book a place.

Important Event

Teagasc Transferring the Family Farm Clinic

Teagasc invite all farm families in Waterford and Kilkenny to participate in a Transferring the Family Farm clinic in the Park Hotel, Dungarvan on Thursday October 5th commencing at 10.30am. There will be teams of solicitors, accountants, Teagasc advisers, mediators, Citizens Advice, and Dept. of Social Protection available to meet with farm families on a one to one basis and answer your questions on transferring your family farm and set you on the right path to developing a succession plan for your family.

Pre booking through www.teagasc.ie/events or by contacting your local Teagasc office is essential. Admission is free and all are welcome.

