



Steering a steady path

Sourcing local calves for his Hereford herd is the cornerstone of Michael Flynn's beef enterprise, writes **Gordon Peppard**



A HUGE crowd of over 700 farmers saw an excellently run Hereford steer system in action when they turned out for the recent Teagasc Green Acres farm walk at Michael Flynn's holding in Puckane, Co Tipperary.

On the day, Michael outlined that his system is one where Hereford bull calves are bought primarily in February and March, ideally sourced directly from farms where possible. Sourcing large number of Hereford calves at this time of the year can be quite challenging he said.

Michael is firm believer of buying an early calf as much as possible, and the plan is not to buy calves born after the first week of April. These calves are reared on a good quality milk replacer with a minimum of 23pc crude protein, fresh water, straw and a 20pc crude protein calf pencil until weaning.

Over the last number of years Michael has been increasing the number of calves reared and this spring 130 calves were reared. In order to alleviate dis-

ease pressure and overcrowding in the calf rearing shed, two batches are moved to a sheltered field with access to a shed after approx. seven to eight weeks.

At grass these calves receive milk replacer twice per day from a feeder unit pulled behind a quad or jeep. The calves were weaned at 11/12 weeks at weights in excess of 100kgs, these calves received just short of two bags of milk replacer each.

The exceptional weaning weights can be attributed to the excellent calf rearing skills of Michael and Kathleen and

the use of adequate levels of milk replacer to support maintenance and growth of the young calf.

Due to a large number of calves coming from many different sources there is a high disease pressure on the system.

In order to combat this, Michael in conjunction with his local vet, Eamon O'Connell, has implemented a vaccination programme where calves 24 hours after arrival receive their first shot of Bovipast RSP to protect against bacterial and viral pneumonia, Bovilis IBR Live intranasal to protect against IBR and Vecoxan to prevent against coccidiosis.

A booster Bovipast RSP is given four weeks later. Calves are given Covexin 8 prior to turn out to protect against the clostridial diseases and a booster shot given four to six weeks later.

On the day Eamon highlighted that a good vaccination programme in a system like Michael's is very important but stressed that this alone can't compensate for poor hygiene management.

It is very important that calf rearing is top notch. Plenty of

straw should be used to ensure that the calf's bed is dry and warm, there should be a good slope on the floor to remove any seepage and sheds should have good ventilation and no draughts.

Good practice around feeding must be adhered to where all equipment is well washed down and cleaned after each feeding. Milk replacer should be fed at the exact same concentration, time and temperature each day as changes in routine can stress calves and stressed calves equals sick calves.

Having being weaned, calves go to grass full time in groups of approximately 50. They receive excellent quality grass and one kg of a calf nut for the summer.

The calves are weighed regularly and on the day the average for the 130 calves was 202kgs.

As Michael has established more paddocks and reseeded a number of fields over the past few years, he now has top quality grass in front of the animals at all times and may reduce the amount of meal fed over the summer in future years.

Castration of the bull calves by burdizzo takes place in September each year.

Depending on weather and ground conditions these calves will be housed in early November at somewhere in the region of 260 - 270kgs.

They will be fed high quality silage and one kg of a 16pc crude protein ration with the aim to gain 80-85 kgs over a 120 day winter.

Michael sees early turnout to grass in the spring as a critical part of achieving a good carcass weights at 22 months.

Grass will have been built up from October and as soon as weather allows, these yearlings will be let out to grass in February. Meal will have been removed two weeks prior to turnout and no meals are fed at grass in the second grazing season. These animals go to grass at an average of 340 - 350kgs.

An average daily at grass of 1.1kgs per day has been achieved over the last number of years and the heaviest 30 animals are selected in mid-August at around 580kgs to start on a finishing programme.

These animals start on two kgs of meal at grass from 15th August and are built up to 5kgs. They are slaughtered in mid-November, reaching carcass weights around 350kgs.

The remaining animals are sold between November and January.

The quality of the stock and the grassland management which could clearly be seen on the day are a credit to Michael and Kathleen.

In the next two years, the Flynn's plan to increase to 170 calves reared, selling a minimum of 162 steers each year allowing for a mortality rate of 5pc over the lifetime of the animal.

Gordon Peppard is programme advisor for the Teagasc Calf to Beef Programme



Over 700 people attended the Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef farm walk on Michael Flynn's holding near Puckane, Co Tipperary
PHOTO: FEARGAL SHANAHAN

Last chance on winter housing

TIME WAITS for no one and before we know it, it will be time to start housing stock for the winter.

If not already completed, now is the last chance to get cattle sheds ready for the winter. The following check list should now be completed to ensure that all animal houses are ready when required.

All slurry tanks should be emptied before midnight on October 14 if not already done. This is the latest date under the Nitrates Directive that slurry can be spread before next January.

Each shed should be cleaned out and power washed down to ensure that no diseases are carried over from one year to the next. Once cleaned and washed leave shed to dry out, the longer the time to dry out the better as sunlight itself will act as a natural disinfectant, killing many bugs.

Troughs

Disinfectants and lime can also be used to help keep disease levels at bay.

Ensure that all water troughs are in good working order and that a good clean supply of water is available.

Any maintenance on pipes, troughs should be undertaken immediately.

Checks that all barriers, gates, latches, hinges are working and replaced or fixed where necessary.

Ensure that the ventilation in the shed is adequate, watch out for cob webs in the roof area and raise sheets, put in space boards etc where there is a problem, ensuring that there are no draughts in the shed.



Gordon Peppard, Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef programme advisor, with Kathleen and Michael Flynn on their 57ha farm in Co Tipperary
PHOTO: FEARGAL SHANAHAN

Maximising the benefits of the autumn rotation

NO ONE can predict or plan what the weather and ground conditions will be like next February and early March for early grazing, but the one thing that farmers can plan for is to have grass available at this time if conditions are suitable to graze. It is better to be looking at the grass in the spring rather than looking for it.

As very little growth will happen between November and February, for grass to be available for grazing in February/early March it must be grown this October.

Each year the grassland management calendar starts in the autumn. The closing date of paddocks and how they are grazed out in the months of October and November has a direct effect on the amount of grass available on the farm in February and March. The 60:40 autumn rotation plan-

ner is a tool used during the last grazing rotation.

The plan must be to close up a set amount of the farm each week until the whole grazing area is closed and animals housed. The paddocks to be closed first in the autumn should be the paddocks/fields that will be grazed first in the spring. These fields are generally the driest, most sheltered and closest to the yard.

The autumn grassland planner is based on a 60:40 rule of thumb, where 60pc of the total farm area would be closed by November 7-10 or one to two weeks earlier on wetter farms.

A consistent amount should be closed each week up to the November 10. When calculating your target areas, ensure to include all lands to be grazed in the spring, including silage

ground that will be grazed before closing for silage. Therefore if you start closing ground on the week of October 10, you have four weeks, to achieve your 60pc target, therefore 15pc of ground should be closed each week. The remaining 40pc should be closed from November 10 to housing.

The idea is that when all paddocks are closed by early December that there would be a range of grass covers on the farm from grazed out (4cm) to 8/9cm.

This would give an average farm cover of around 6cm which equates to 500-600 kg of dry matter per hectare. This will then be the grass that will be available next spring before the growth starts.

Grazing out paddocks too fast

If you are ahead of the target

CASE STUDY: FARMER WITH 80 ACRES OF GRASSLAND STARTING TO CLOSE PADDOCKS ON THE WEEK OF OCT 10

Dates	% per week	Target area to close p/week	Field name/number	Actual area grazed
Oct 10-16	15%	12 acres	House field & near paddocks	11 acres
Oct 17-23	15%	12 acres	Hill & silage fields	14 acres
Oct 24-30	15%	12 acres	Long field & 6 acres	13 acres
Oct 31-Nov 7	15%	12 acres	Doyle's & River fields	10 acres
Total by Nov 7	60%	48 acres		48 acres

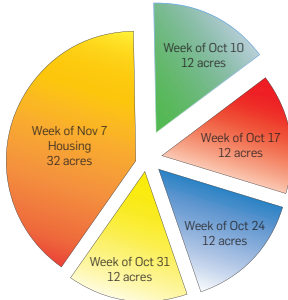
areas to be grazed, extra stock may need to be housed earlier than was planned or if ground conditions allowed you could start some supplementary feeding at grass. Heavier cattle should be housed

first if ground conditions deteriorate.

Grazing out paddocks too slowly

If you are grazing too little of the area to make the targets, then

TARGET AREA TO BE GRAZED AND CLOSED: eg 80-acre farm



the rotation needs to be sped up, this can be done by grazing some of the lighter covers first in order to get the required area grazed off. It is essential to stick to the areas to be grazed off each week, if you don't, the area won't have enough time to grow.

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