



Silage budgeting on BETTER beef farms

This week, Ciarán Lenehan carried out vital winter fodder budgets on two of our BETTER beef farms

With winter well and truly in on most of our BETTER beef farms, we paid a visit to two this week to assess fodder supply.

John McSweeney keeps 28 cows on 24ha near Lissarda in Cork. His sucklers are predominantly of Angus breeding. He also rears over 120 dairy calves, finishing some and moving the rest on as stores. His own suckler calves are finished as bulls, typically under 16 months.

Further north on the Offaly-Laois border, John Dunne will be calving over 120 continental-type cows next spring on a farm just shy of 300 acres. He brings his male calves to beef as bullocks and has reared 53 dairy calves in 2017.

Two very contrasting farms, but two farmers for whom winter has begun early.

"I've still got some weaned cows out but most of them are indoors. Parts of the farm are hilly and can take a bit of moisture, but the flatter ground is very difficult at the moment," John McSweeney said.

In Offaly, things are somewhat worse.

"I was forced to house all of my cows after last Friday's rain. I did 100 miles in one day ferrying loads from my out-farm. We're about three weeks ahead of a normal year. I hadn't yet vaccinated my calves and now I'm weaning them in a shed. It's risky, but thankfully the first couple of batches were weaned without any health issues."

We carried out fodder budgets with both farmers this week.

John McSweeney is confident that his average winter period will be 4.5 months from now, when early turnout of very light stock would be taken into account. This is one of the advantages of having lots of your spring stocking power in the form of yearling dairy-bred calves.

He will have calves coming in January, but there is a good degree of shed space that can be utilised should weather not allow for turnout of heavier suckler cows.

John Dunne's average winter is also 4.5 months. Though he will be hoping to get a lot of his lighter stock out, as well as turning out cows with calves as they come, he has 100 forward stores to be finished late next spring.

The table below shows how much silage both will need this winter. The "req/head" column indicates how much each animal requires in a silage-only scenario and takes into account the portion of the diet that concentrates will account for.

Measuring

Our winter feeding focus magazine earlier this month gave a detailed breakdown on how to measure fodder reserves and budget based on animal requirements. With silage pits, multiply length x width x height of the clamp to derive a volume figure. This is extremely subjective, given that most clamps are not perfect cubic shapes. Where the clamp is sloped, use an average height figure based on your own estimation. Divide the final figure by 45 for 20% dry matter silage and 55% for 30% dry matter silage – this is another area where your silage test will come in handy.

Alternatively, assume that poor-, average- or good-yielding first-cut silage will produce 7t, 8t or 9t per acre respectively. With second-cut, assume 3t, 4t or 5t per acre for poor-, average- or good-yielding crops. However, guessing like this is far



John McSweeney working out what silage he requires this winter.

less accurate than taking the measuring tape to the clamp.

Those making bales can use Table 3 to calculate each bale's equivalent weight as 25% dry matter pit silage. This will depend on the length of the wilting period and the weather at harvest. Bales mowed and cut on the same day in relatively dry conditions will have a dry matter of 25%. A 24-hour wilt will lift this figure to 30%, while a 48-hour wilt in hot sunny weather will produce 40% dry matter bales.

John McSweeney made all baled silage in 2017 and his average dry matter according to his silage analysis is approximately 30%. He has 470 bales in the yard, which equates to 366t of silage required for the winter (Table 2).

He is facing a silage deficit of 32t based



John Dunne measures his silage pit at his farm in Portarlington.

Table 1: Silage requirements for John McSweeney (Cork) and John Dunne (Offaly) this winter

	Req/head (t/month)	Numbers		4.5 month requirement	
		John McSweeney	John Dunne	John McSweeney	John Dunne
Suckler cow	1.4	28	93	176	586
Weanling 350kg	0.7 (less 20% concentrates)	20	97	50	245
Weanling 250kg	0.54 (less 30% concentrates)	101	53	172	90
500kg store	1.3 (less 50% concentrates)		100		293
Springing heifers	1.3 (less 20% concentrates)		32		150
Total silage required (tonnes)				398	1,364

Table 2: Fodder stocks for John McSweeney and John Dunne

	Tonnes from pit	Tonnes from bales	Total - required
John McSweeney	n/a	366	-32
John Dunne	923 + 414	62	35

Table 3: Converting round bales to 25% DM pit silage based on bale DM%.

Bale % DM	Equivalent tonnage as 25% DM pit silage
25	0.65
30	0.78
35	0.91
40	1.04

Example silage pit measurement

John Dunne - Pit 1

$$\left(\begin{matrix} \text{Length} \\ 90\text{ft} \end{matrix} \times \begin{matrix} \text{Width} \\ 47\text{ft} \end{matrix} \times \begin{matrix} \text{Height} \\ 12\text{ft} \end{matrix} \right) \div 55 = 923\text{t}$$

on his requirements (Table 1), meaning that he needs to source 40 bales or the equivalent.

John Dunne has two pits and 80 bales of paddock silage. His silage is approximately 30% dry matter also. There is 923t of silage in John's first pit and 414t in his second pit.

He also has 62t of silage in the form of



VIDEO ONLINE
watch the video on
farmersjournal.tv

saved paddock bales. At present, his budget reads a surplus of 35t of silage.

Deficit

"I had a feeling that I'd be in a deficit. Thankfully there's a man that I'm renting a shed from who has some silage to sell. At least you know where you stand with a budget and can take action in time,"

Prioritise heavy covers before the rain

NATHAN TUFFY
WESTERN LIVESTOCK SPECIALIST
ntuffy@farmersjournal.ie

The relatively dry weather over the past week has allowed farmers on dry land to continue on target with their autumn rotation planner. Those in the west or northwest have had difficulty keeping with the planner in recent weeks. While the current dry spell is offering some respite, the majority of farmers have not been able to get cows back out to grass.

Autumn-calved cows are the priority group to get out and keep out where possible. With the current dry weather, farmers on heavy land that have heavy grass covers on some paddocks should prioritise light stock, weanlings or sheep to graze off these fields, as heavy covers will deteriorate over the winter, reducing grass quality in early spring. The earlier these covers can be grazed off the more high DMD grass will be available for grazing next spring. Weanlings are still out at grass in several areas. On drier farms some beef cattle are

*In short

- Housing continuing across farms.
- Most cows housed in the west.
- Some heifers being finished off grass in the coming week.
- Housing being carried out on dry days.
- Dry farms following autumn rotation planner.
- Heavy farms prioritising eating off heavy covers.

still being supplemented with meal at grass and will be slaughtered off grass in the coming weeks. In most cases farmers on dry ground have 60-70% of the farm closed, with the remainder to be closed in the coming weeks. On heavy farms the target is to have the entire farm closed by early to mid-November if not already closed. Where cattle are housed, they should be watched closely for any early signs of pneumonia. Make sure that air flow through sheds is adequate, but also ensure that there are no draughts.



Source: PastureBase Ireland, Agrinet and Irish Farmers Journal.



Tommy Holmes
Co Mayo

System suckler to steer beef
Soil type variable

The weather is unnaturally mild for this time of year. Unfortunately, it is too little too late as I've housed all my stock bar a handful of bull weanlings. Accommodation is tight but I've cattle coming fit for slaughter so this will free up a couple of pens. I'm keeping a very close eye on cattle indoors as this type of weather is sure to bring pneumonia but I have good ventilation in sheds and I'm leaving the doors open at night.

Luckily, I managed to get 10 loads of slurry out prior to the slurry application deadline which should see me out of trouble. I used the dribble bar for the first time and I would highly recommend this system for anyone thinking of changing away from the conventional splash-plate method.

Calving has gone well thus far with no casualties to report. I'm very much in the transition stage as I hope to compact my calving spread while increasing numbers with a view to calving everything in autumn.



Cathal Breen
Co Wexford

System suckler to steer beef
Soil type heavy clay

The recent spell of good weather has improved ground conditions and as a result stock are getting good utilisation out of paddocks. There is over 60% of the farm closed at this stage and some covers are starting to come back well. Farmyard manure was spread on low-index paddocks over the last few weeks. I have over half of my calves weaned at this stage and the remainder of them will be weaned over the next few weeks. Cows with calves left suckling are being used to clean out paddocks after a group of my dairy-bred calves.

Cows are being supplemented with high mag buckets and they also have access to hay as a precaution against grass tetany. All 2016-born steers are now housed at this stage and they are split in two different groups for meal feeding. I also have a group of heifers which will be housed shortly and they will be slaughtered in the next few weeks. Scanning was completed last week and it has gone very well, with only two empty cows.



Stanley farm
Co Tipperary

System Suckler to beef
Soil type variable

We have housed most of our stock by now. Only a few heifers close to finishing remain outside on meal and these will be killed soon off grass. We are weighing stock next week and will categorise the forward stores depending on weight. Anything over 500kg will be finished inside over the winter while the remainder will be stored and killed off grass next summer. We purchased 63 autumn calves this year and will begin weaning them soon. I plan to turn them out to grass in December or January and will feed 1kg of ration also. Given the fact these calves are light they will be ideal to graze off recent reseeded without doing any damage. The majority of the farm is closed up since 20 October and our reseed has progressed well in the mild autumn.

Autumn calving has finished and breeding will start soon. I am looking at the option of using AI on these cows for the first time. It will allow me to be more selective on my sire choice and will allow me to use some more maternal genetics on my herd.



Ger O'Dwyer
Tullamore Farm

System suckler to steer beef
Soil type variable

Grass has continued to grow, albeit at a lower rate over the past seven days. The farm grew 21kg DM/ha over the past week. Demand has dropped to 12kg DM/ha. Farm cover is running at 610kg DM/ha. There is currently 63% (50.6ha) of the farm closed and paddocks closed in early October have covers of 1,000-1,200kg/DM at the moment. The plan is to have all cattle housed by 22 November.

The weanling bulls were housed on Friday 27 October and are being fed 3kg of a 16% protein nut that was being fed at grass. They will move on to a barley, soya hulls, maize meal and soya bean meal mix in the next week. They are also being fed the highest-quality silage at 78DMD. Dung has been quite loose since housing so we are feeding some hay to settle them down. Fifty-one cows started to graze kale on Friday also. Their tails were clipped and each cow received two mineral boluses. They have access to silage bales as they graze the kale. The dry few days has helped settle them into grazing and they seem very happy on it.

10-year average grass growth

kg DM/ha/day

