

# BETTERfarm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH



Silage is variable on the BETTER Farms and cows are being fed based on body condition and fodder quality.

## SET TARGETS AND MAKE CHANGES

The BETTER Farms are completing their profit monitor to assess the costs of production over the past 12 months and to monitor the success of the changes made



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A new production year has descended upon us and it will bring with it many challenges for the suckler industry.

January is a time when people make new year's resolutions regarding what they wish to change, but they rarely last longer than a few months.

What will you change in your suckler system that will make a difference to both the profit margin and perfor-

mance of your herd? More importantly, will you keep to the changes and follow them through?

All too often, some producers will disregard and abandon the changes to their system if there is no immediate benefit to be realised. Quick-fix solutions can have an immediate effect, but they do not always offer a lasting benefit. Instead, to make any real impact on farm profit, the farmer needs to develop a framework, which will allow him to target the areas that are inefficient within the farm gate and set out a step-by-step guide and timeframe of how these changes will be realised.

The first task for the new year for participants in the BETTER Farm programme is to complete their profit monitor. Once this is complete, the programme farm-

ers can address the areas that need to be improved this year in an orderly manner.

The profit monitor should be used as a baseline for financial and physical performance on any suckler farm.

You have to know how successful your business is before you evaluate how successful changes made to the farm system actually are.

The programme farms are measuring change in gross margin per hectare on farm.

The gross margin is calculated as the herd output minus the standard costs of grassland (fertilizer, lime, grass seed), concentrates, contractor costs and veterinary costs, all of which are common costs on livestock farms.

Phase one of the BETTER Farm programme showed that following a strategic farm plan based on factual

information recorded on the farm increased the average GM/ha from €367 to €879 over a three-year period, with 66% of this increase coming from improved technical efficiency inside the farm gate.

Given the expenses incurred in the past year, completing a profit monitor should be an essential task carried out on every farm to make progress.

Land is the single greatest asset of any farm business and every farmer should be looking to maximise the potential of their ground. The level of output can be compared with the average farm and the top third of suckler farms across the country.

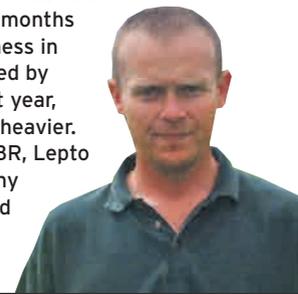
With BTAP promoting the profit monitor, there is greater information available on the costs of suckler production, allowing for a more accurate comparison.

### DONAL SCULLY

Co Limerick

As I calve cows from July to September, the calves are still suckling cows. They are housed on a straw lieback area and have access to the cows at night. By day, weather permitting, they are grazing the fields beside the sheds and getting 1kg of ration. Cows have finished breeding now and are on 73 DMD pit silage and minerals. I have 12 Friesian steers on 6kg of meal and silage in an open yard. They will hopefully be finished by early February. Replacement heifers and cows that have not scanned in-calf are in an open yard eating 1kg of ration with the remainder of the cows on the slats on silage only.

I tested cattle for fluke and the results showed up rumen fluke in a large number of cattle, so I have dosed them with Zanil. No liver fluke were present so my dosing strategy is working. I had dosed with Tribex last winter and Albex during this year's grazing season. Herd health overall has been relatively good here in the last 12 months with no obvious signs of any sickness in stock. Cow liveweight has increased by 60kg compared with this time last year, while calves are on average 28kg heavier. All stock are vaccinated against IBR, Lepto and BVD. It is costly to use so many vaccinations but I feel that the end results are worth the input.

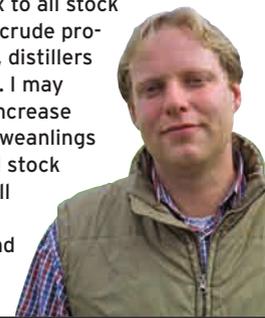


### RICHARD WILLIAMSON

Co Meath

I had a good bank of grass built up on the farm this autumn. With the good weather and dry ground conditions, I was able to keep my weaned spring-calving cows and replacement heifers out until mid-December. Cows are fed late first-cut grass silage (65% DMD) ad lib and pre-calving minerals. I will keep a close eye on cow body condition. I killed 18 of my Angus heifers in late November and they averaged 250kg carcass weight. I decided to keep 10 of the bigger-framed heifers for some extra feeding as they did not seem fit to kill. They are fed silage ad lib and 5kg concentrates. I picked out 20 of my biggest bull weanlings that I may finish as bull beef under 16 months. They are fed grass silage ad lib (66% DMD) and 4.5kg of concentrates, but I will increase the level of concentrates in late January to coincide with the growth curve of the bull.

The lighter bulls and heifer weanlings are fed silage ad-lib with 2kg of concentrates as they will return to grass in the spring. I am feeding the same concentrate mix to all stock groups for simplicity. The mix is 15% crude protein and is comprised of rolled barley, distillers and soya hulls and costs €245/tonne. I may add soya bean meal to the ration to increase the protein in the overall diet for the weanlings to 16%. I took faecal samples from all stock groups and, based on the results, I will dose my cows for fluke and treat any suspect animals with Levafas Diamond for rumen fluke.



### MARTY LENEHAN

Co Sligo

All of the autumn-calving cows have finished calving. Overall, it was a good calving season and the calves are performing well. The cows have their tails clipped and were treated for lice when they were housed. It reduces sweating and has been done for a number of years and is beneficial.

By clipping the cows' tails, it reduces dirty udders and the risk of bacteria being ingested by the calves. All of the calves have restricted access to the cows and suckle morning and evening. The calves have access to outdoor grazing throughout the winter. I find that the calves are much healthier when they can get out to graze.

Faecal samples taken on the farm will be used as part of the dosing programme. The spring-calving herd starts calving from 1 January. I still have some spring-born weanling bulls out grazing but these will be sold shortly.





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**PAT O'REILLY**

Co Clare

All of my cows are housed with the last groups to be housed in mid-December. Spring-calving cows are eating 66 DMD silage and were given a trace element bullet. Autumn-calving cows are being fed 71 DMD silage. They are also getting 2kg of an 80:20 barley/soya ration, plus minerals. Autumn calves are on 2kg maize munch along with silage. They will be on grass from January.

The finishing stock consisting of bulls, heifers and cull cows are eating 5kg of maize munch, 18kg of sugar beet and 71 DMD silage.

All cows were dosed with Levafas Diamond

earlier in the winter. Cows were also vaccinated with Rotavec Corona. I have not vaccinated my calves and, so far, they seem to be healthy.

I will monitor them closely on a daily basis for any signs of scour. Stock were dosed with Closamectin earlier in the winter. I find that using the pour-on products is much less stressful on both man and beast.

**MARK MAXWELL**

Co Westmeath

All cattle are housed on farm with the last of the spring calvers coming indoors before Christmas. Cows are housed on slats and eating 68 DMD baled silage. My autumn-calving has finished up with all cows calved in a 12-week period, which I am happy with. Spring weanlings are on 1.5kg of a 15% ration and have ad-lib access to silage. Autumn-calving cows are on 72 DMD silage and minerals. Their calves are getting 1kg per day of an 18% protein ration.

Finishing steers and heifers are on 5kg of finishing ration and the bulls are on 8kg of the finishing ration, along with good quality silage. I

have vaccinated cows for IBR and Lepto. I have treated my cattle for rumen fluke and I have also treated them for liver fluke and worms throughout the year.

Faecal samples have been taken and were clear, showing that my dosing regime is working.

**CATHAL CREAN**

Co Wexford

After last winter, I had no reserves of silage to carry over for this winter. Therefore, I decided to grow six acres of fodder beet to boost my feed stocks. We harvested the beet on 26 November and it yielded approximately 38 to 40 tonnes per acre. The dry back end allowed me to keep some cows out until mid-December, as I strip-grazed the beet tops with 58 cows for almost two weeks after harvesting.

The cows were all housed with the last going in on 13 December and they are being fed second-cut silage ad lib with 1kg to 2kg of barley straw and pre-calving minerals. I purchased a diet feeder so cows can be fed a complete TMR.

My weanling heifers are housed on an out-farm and being fed first-cut silage ad lib and supplemented with 2kg of concentrates and minerals.

The concentrate mix is made up of 85% homegrown rolled barley and 15% soya bean meal. The weanling bulls are housed on the

home farm and are fed 15kg of silage, 8kg of fodder beet, 0.5kg of soya bean meal, 0.5kg straw and high-phosphate minerals and vitamins.

My 2012 spring-born heifers are due to be finished early in the new year and are being fed 20kg of silage, 20kg of fodder beet, 1kg of rolled barley, 0.5kg soya bean meal, 0.5kg of straw supplemented with hi-phosphate minerals.

My weanlings were dosed with an Ivermectin-based product shortly before housing and faecal samples show that they are clear of stomach worm and lungworm.

**PATRICK GRENNAN**

Co Wexford

My bulls were housed during the last week of November and are on good silage (74 DMD and 13% protein) supplemented with 4kg of a 16% protein concentrate mix made up of rolled barley, soya hulls, rapeseed cake, soya bean meal and minerals.

The bulls destined for 16-month-old bull beef weighed 430kg on 10 December and gained 1.3kg per day since birth. I will increase their level of concentrates in February.

With the dry summer, my farm was under pressure at times to grow grass due to drought so my silage supplies are tight. I sowed fodder rape on the stubbles after I cut my spring barley to reduce silage demand. My weanling heifers started grazing it in early November and got six weeks grazing from it using a leader-follower system.

Weanling heifers are fed 2kg of the grower ration and good quality (70+ DMD) baled silage ad lib during housing. The fattening heifers

should be fit in early January. They are eating good quality silage and have been built up to 7kg of a high-energy finishing ration which is made from rolled barley, maize meal, rapeseed cake, soya bean meal and minerals. I managed to extend my grazing season for the suckler cows as grass had built up on the out-farm due to the good growth in late September and October.

The cows will be fed poorer quality silage (late first-cut and second-cut) with barley straw included as a buffer to help stretch it out. I will supplement them with pre-calving minerals.

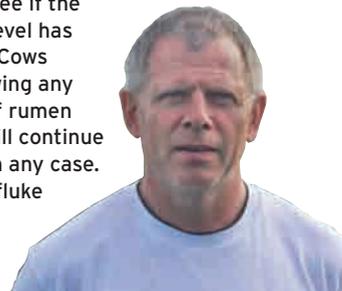
**GER DINEEN**

Co Cork

Cows were housed on 7 December and fed ad-lib silage that tested 63 DMD. They will remain on it until calving. Bulls were housed eight weeks ago and are on 72 DMD silage and 5kg of ration. The ration consists of barley, soya and distillers and is around 14% protein. Weanling heifers are on 1kg of the same ration plus silage. They will be sold soon. In-calf heifers are being fed 63 DMD silage ad lib. This is adequate as they have plenty of size already and I only want to maintain them until they calve.

All cattle are housed on slats with bulls on rubber mats. I find that they help greatly in providing comfort for the animals. On my farm, I vaccinate stock for BVD, leptospirosis and salmonella.

I had an issue with pneumonia in bulls recently but have treated them successfully. Faecal samples showed up low positive results for rumen fluke in cows and in-calf heifers but were clear for weanlings. I will re-test in early January to see if the infestation level has progressed. Cows are not showing any symptoms of rumen fluke but I will continue to monitor in any case. All the liver fluke results were negative.

**RICHARD JENNINGS**

Co Mayo

My cows started calving from mid-November and I have 45 cows calved out of 60 breeding females. Once calved, they are in an individual calving pen for two to three days before moving into a group pen of seven cows. When the calves are one week old, I group them and they have access to a lieback.

As I have a compact calving season, all of the calves are of similar age when grouped, which reduces the risk of stress and disease. The cows' tails are clipped, which reduces the risk of the calves ingesting bacteria indoors.

The weanling heifers and ewes are still out at grass. Once the calves get stronger, I will let them outdoors to graze during the day. Faecal

samples were taken on the farm and they were used as part of the dosing programme. I found it beneficial to carry out the tests as it allows me to treat the animals, as required.

The cows were already bolused prior to calving to cover for selenium, copper, cobalt and iodine.

All cows will get their annual vaccinations prior to calving for BVD and leptospirosis.

**JAMES STRAIN**

Co Donegal

I have 27 of my 31 autumn-calving cows calved to date. The first calves from the new Charolais bull I bought last year, which is a son of Pirate, are on the ground. They look promising and I am happy with them. They will be going out to grass early in the new year, which will break the cow-calf bond, helping to bring the cows into heat earlier.

The calves are much healthier and have increased weight gain when they have access to pasture. I will be using the results from faecal tests to decide which dosing programme I will use. All cows will get their annual vaccinations prior to the start of the breeding season. I changed the penning of the cows last winter.

Instead of penning to calving date, I penned them to the body condition of the cows and it has worked well. I also changed the ventilation in the shed. The side cladding was removed and replaced with space boarding. This has helped the flow of air and, hopefully, will prevent stale air developing in the calf creep areas.

**JOE MURRAY**

Co Roscommon

After a dry, mild autumn, the cows with calves were housed in mid-December. This was a huge benefit to me as having a heavy farm can limit the grazing season.

The late housing date has reduced silage requirements greatly. I have 58 cows out of my 73 calved so far. I am pleased with how the calving season is progressing.

The calves were much stronger coming indoors after being out for the first few weeks, compared with being born indoors and not getting out until spring.

The calves have access to a straw lieback and can go out to the paddock during the day. This reduces the risk of viruses and scour develop-

ing among the calves. Some calves have got their second vaccination. I will be dosing the cows early in the new year, based on faecal sample results. I dosed the weanling heifers and replacement heifers at housing.

Faecal sample results will allow me to see if the dose was effective or if further treatment is required.

