

BETTERfarm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

DELAYS IN SLAUGHTERING CATTLE



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A number of BETTER Farm participants have not been immune to the recent difficulties in getting cattle slaughtered. The backlog in the weekly kill was initially creating difficulties

on the programme farms for getting bulls slaughtered. But in the past week there have been a number of farmers who are struggling to get QA in-spec steers and heifers slaughtered.

One of the farms that slaughters cattle through the Aberdeen Angus premium beef scheme is also experiencing delays in offloading cattle. The issue is creating a number of problems on the farms. The price for cattle is also being affected, lowering sale value.

As some cattle were housed at a lower liveweight

in 2013, due to the lack of thrive in the first six months, carcase weights are expected to be lower than in the previous year, which further devalues cattle sales.

Other problems being created by the situation are mounting feed costs and cattle running the risk of becoming overweight, through no fault of the programme farmers.

Once cattle fall out of the required goldbox market spec, they are automatically worth less.

With the profit monitors now completed, the pro-

gramme management team plans to review all business plans for the farms this spring.

While there will not be any knee jerk reactions made to the current market situation, some of the farms may wish to change their system from 18-month bull beef to an alternative market, if it is in their best interest.

Weather

Continued heavy rainfall is taking its toll on the farms. With difficult ground conditions, the ability to allow calves out to graze during

the day is becoming limited. Some of the farms have stopped the practice of day grazing after land became flooded over the weekend.

Slurry storage is coming under pressure. Heavy rainfall is causing high levels of surface run off in farm yards, which in turn is causing tanks to fill up. Some slurry was spread on a select number of farms in mid-January, but since then no further activity has been reported.

With grazing ground unsuitable for carrying machinery, there is unlikely to

be any chance of spreading within the next week on dry land and for a considerable period of time on heavier soils. Ground is currently unsuitable for spreading using a pipeline as land is saturated.

Waterlogging will be keeping soil temperatures low. As such, there will be very low levels of grass regrowth where any calves, weanlings or sheep have been grazing in the past fortnight.

Once weather conditions improve, the farms will start applying fertilizer as soon as soil temperatures increase.

ON THE GROUND

“The incidence of rumen fluke is becoming more of a problem in the Irish suckler herd”

Herd health plays an integral part in cattle performance. Just as soil can be analysed for nutrients and silage for its feed value, cattle can be tested for a number of health related topics. Blood samples will provide an indication of mineral status and the prevalence of diseases, such as BVD and Lepto.

Worms and fluke are common parasites that present annually in herds across Ireland. Many farms will adopt a routine dosing strategy regardless of the extent of the worm and fluke burden. In recent years, wet summers have seen an increase

in fluke levels and there are some reports of cattle herds and sheep flocks developing fluke problems earlier in the year.

Along with liver fluke, the incidence of rumen fluke is becoming more of a problem in the Irish suckler herd. It is normally associated with land areas that are prone to flooding or frequent water logging, but there a number of farms on drier land that are also experiencing problems with the parasite.

FEC testing

Over December, the BETTER Farm participants collected faecal samples from different groups of cattle in their

herds. Each farm collected up to five pooled samples and a total of 34 farms were tested. Samples were collected from groups of cattle that grazed different land blocks, e.g. rented land, outfarms, heavy soils and dry soils (see tables one to four).

All cattle were sampled shortly after they were housed as they were no longer ingesting any fluke eggs. As housing in 2013 was much later than initially planned, due to good grazing conditions in October and November, cattle housed in late November and early December should have had mature fluke present by the time the samples were taken.



Faecal sampling of cattle in December has shown the presence of rumen fluke on BETTER Farms.

There were some cattle groups on heavier farms that had received treatment for immature fluke before they were housed. Dan Fingleton's was one such farm and results for all cattle groups were negative for liver fluke, indicating an effective treatment. As cattle could have ingested new fluke eggs after treating at grass, the best practice for the farm is to

retest cattle around eight weeks after housing to see if any mature fluke has developed since the first treatment. There are a number of options for faecal sampling. In the case of the BETTER Farms, the samples were taken on the farm by the farmers and four programme advisers. They were then sent for analysis and results were received in five days. Sample results were broken down into four groups:

- Negative
- Low positive
- Positive
- Strong positive

Rumen fluke

Rumen fluke is becoming more common in Irish suckler herds and the BETTER Farms have been sampling to confirm its presence for the past two years. Some of the more common clinical signs of rumen fluke are:

- Rapid weight loss
- Watery scour
- Anaemia
- Dullness
- Dehydration

In general, cattle on the farms that had strong positive results for rumen fluke received treatment. As there is only one active ingredient that can effectively kill rumen fluke – oxcyclozanide – it must be used effectively.

Overuse of oxcyclozanide will lead to increased resistance to the limited range of products that are most effective in controlling rumen fluke.

As there is only one active ingredient for treatment, the advice that the BETTER Farms are following is to test for the parasite first, using the faecal sample kit.

There were eight farms with low levels of rumen fluke present. In such cases, where no clinical signs of

Table 1: Rumen and liver fluke samples - south east area

	Liver Fluke				Rumen Fluke			
	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive
Billy Gilmore	5				5			
Cathal Crean	4	1			2	3		
Dan Fingleton	5				3	2		
James Madigan	4	1				1	2	2
Patrick Drohan	4		1		2	2	1	
Patrick Grennan	4		1		4	1		
Sean Power	5				1	4		
Tomas Murphy	5				4	1		
Trevor Minion	5				2	3		
James Keneally	5				1	3		1



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WEEK IN REVIEW

- ➔ The programme farms are experiencing delays in slaughtering cattle of all classes with some farms waiting up to three weeks to get certain cattle killed.
- ➔ Cattle that have reached the correct level of finish run the risk of going overweight and overfat. Heifers are most at risk of going out of spec.
- ➔ Delayed killing is affecting slaughter price which is reducing carcass value.
- ➔ Heavy rainfall is making it difficult to allow calves to on/off graze.
- ➔ Slurry storage is coming under pressure with surface run off from heavy rainfall.

➔ Do not use a microwave or boiling water to thaw out frozen colostrum. It should be thawed gradually, at room temperature or in lukewarm water. Heating colostrum quickly can break down the protein present.

TOP TIP



Faecal sample kit used on the BETTER Farms to monitor liver fluke and rumen fluke levels.

rumen fluke was present in cattle with low readings the animals were not treated. Instead, the programme farmers will continue to monitor these animals closely for early signs of rumen fluke before treating cattle. Animals may be retested to monitor the egg levels.

Cost saving

The other benefit from faecal sampling is that there is a cost saving if a drench is not required. At a cost of €50 for a 2.5 litre product containing oxyclozanide, each ml administered to cattle costs 2c. Assuming the dosing rate is 25ml/100kg liveweight, a herd with 25 store animals, weighing 400kg liveweight, will have a dosing cost of €2 per animal.

If there is a suspected rumen fluke problem, then the farm could face a medicine bill of €50 to treat all animals. A faecal test will cost between €7 to €10 per sample, but if the herd is sampled and a rumen fluke dose is not required, there is a potential cost saving of approximately €40 over the 25 animals.

Performance loss

Billy Glasheen operates a store-to-beef enterprise near Mullinahone, Co Tipperary. In the late summer of 2013, his store cattle developed a severe rumen fluke problem and livestock performance was greatly hindered. As he weighs cattle regularly, Billy was able to put a cost on the lost performance.

Between 25 July and 2 October, cattle had a daily liveweight gain of 0.29kg liveweight/day. After treatment, daily liveweight gain recovered to 1.2kg liveweight/day for the more forward

Table 2: Rumen and liver fluke samples - south west area

	Liver Fluke				Rumen Fluke			
	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive
Adrian Kelly	5				5			
David Walsh	4				1	2		1
Donal Scully	5				1		4	
Donie Ahern	4					3	2	
Ger Dineen	5				2	3		
Mike Dillane	5				4	1		

Table 3: Rumen and liver fluke samples - north west area

	Liver Fluke				Rumen Fluke			
	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive
Billy Gilmore	5				4	1		
Niall Patterson	4				3			1
Joe Murray	5				1		4	
Marty Lenehan	3		2		1		4	
Richard Jennings	4		1			2	2	1
Sean Coughlan	4	1				3		2

Table 4: Rumen and liver fluke samples - north east area

	Liver Fluke				Rumen Fluke			
	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive	Negative	Low Positive	Positive	Strong Positive
Chris McCarthy	4				2	2		
Frank & Des Beirne	5				3	1	1	
Mark Maxwell	5				5			
Michael Smith	4		1		1	4		
Richard Williamson	4		1		2	1		2
Tom Halpin	5				4	1		

finishing cattle. The drop in performance means that the cattle were behind target for housing weight by an average of 40kg liveweight. Billy has valued this lost performance across 51 cattle at 2,040kg of liveweight, which at €2/kg liveweight is a loss of €4,080.

Liver fluke

The faecal samples showed relatively few mature liver fluke problems.

However, as liver fluke

eggs are not shown in the faecal samples, the advice the farmers are following is to treat the cattle with an appropriate product at the correct time.

For instance, with a negative liver fluke result, like most of the farms had, farmers could treat cattle with a product targeting early immature and immature liver fluke burdens.

Alternatively, they could wait and treat for mature liver fluke. Where a product

targeting early immature fluke is used, then the cattle will be retested to ensure it had an effective kill level.

On farms where there are cattle and sheep present, using Triclabendazole products should be used with care as there is a higher level of resistance in sheep.

Proper health planning between the programme farms, advisers and vets delivers the best treatment options for the entire farm which is cost effective and practical.

FARMER FOCUS

Mike Dillane Co Kerry

Calving is almost complete and the herd should be finished calving almost two months earlier than last year. As part of the BETTER farm programme, one of the aims was to tighten my calving spread and so far it looks like we will manage to achieve this. I am planning to calve cows from September to Christmas this year.

So far, calving has gone well with no major problems and I have 82 calves from 82 cows on the ground. I am currently 80% of the way through the insemination of the herd. This is my first year using 100% AI to breed the herd and it is working well. I have 70 cows and heifers served so far and have only seen 10% of cows repeat. The cows will, hopefully, be scanned in the next week and I am hopeful to get a high conception rate.

Calves are eating 1kg of



ration daily and will be allowed to graze paddocks surrounding the sheds as soon as the ground dries up. Land is completely saturated in north Kerry at the moment. So far I am lucky as I have another few weeks of slurry storage left.

Young finishing bulls are currently eating around 10kg of ration per day, along with straw and roughly 5kg of silage. They had a setback before Christmas when performance was reduced dramatically. A number of changes were made, including a small increase in space allowance, extra water trough access and changing of ration constituents. I added yeast to the ration and feel it has helped prevent digestive upsets on the high cereal diet. The extra water trough is also very important in my opinion.

I am due to weigh the cattle this week and visually they seem to have come on well. I plan to kill them under 16 months of age, in March.

I expect many of the bulls to be around 600kg liveweight at the moment, despite the setback.

Donal Scully Co Limerick

I currently have 12 Friesian steers ready for finishing and I plan to kill them in the next week. They are approaching 23 months of age and weigh around 615kg liveweight. They are currently on 6kg of a finishing ration and ad-lib 73 DMD silage.

Any calves that are being weaned are currently eating 3kg of ration per day and ad-lib silage. Calves still on the cow are getting 1kg of ration plus access to 73 DMD silage. I had planned to have these calves grazing around the sheds over winter, but the weather has been so wet since mid-December my ground is completely saturated. As soon as ground dries up I plan to let stock out.

I have six cull cows being fattened and they are eating 6kg/day of ration along with 73 DMD silage. Cattle are thriving well at the minute with bull calves averaging 1.3kg/head/day and heifer calves averaging 1.1kg/



head/day. Herd health has been extremely good lately with no signs of pneumonia in any stock.

I am planning on scanning the cows next week to see how the breeding season has gone. I have a number of heifers calving into the herd this year to increase cow numbers.

To increase output, I am also purchasing some cattle for finishing as bulls, under 16 months, in October/November. This is the time of year that I will be finishing my own home bred bulls so they will fit into my system.

Slurry went out on silage ground with the umbilical pipe system 10 days ago during a brief dry spell we had. It worked well as no tyre marks were made on the ground. I am planning to spread half a bag of urea on all grazing land as soon as ground conditions allow.

I recently completed my profit monitor and was pleasantly surprised with the results given the harsh start to 2013.

The results prove that high output combined with top-class grassland management continues to be the best way of making profit.