

BETTER farm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

Silage season draws to a close



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The last of the second-cut silage is now harvested and fodder reserves have been replenished fully. There has been plenty of surplus grazing saved as silage this year also to boost stocks.

The plan from now on in the programme farms is to save grass for autumn grazing and try to hold weanlings or autumn calving cows out at grass for as long as possible. Most of the farms have been applying a bag of nitrogen to grazing ground. This will be the final dressing applied this year.

Ground that is being reseeded at present will get a dressing of nitrogen before the closed period for chemical fertilizer comes into play.

There has been some re-seeding taking place in the past week, with plans for

more re-seeding to be carried out in early September.

Weather has been holding back some of the programme farmers from proceeding with their original re-seeding plans, as frequent showers have limited ploughing opportunities. While the majority of farms have been getting weekly rainfall, there

are a small number that have received little rainfall since early summer. As a result, grass growth in these areas has been severely hindered and silage has been used to supplement cattle intakes.

The lack of soil moisture has limited fertilizer applications and on one farm, it has hindered germination

of grass seed in reseeded ground.

Grass growth

Grass growth this week averaged 44kg DM/ha/day. While growth rates are starting to tail off in line with normal seasonal growth, the majority of programme farms are getting excellent grass

utilisation when grazing, which is helping to clean out paddocks.

As cattle are getting the full-time period of grazing in paddocks (two, three or four days), it is easier to build grazing covers, as cattle are now in a 20- to 25-day rotation compared with 12 to 14 days around one month ago.

Table 1: Converting growth rate into kilos of liveweight per hectare/acre

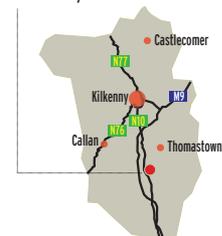
	Daily growth rate kg/DM/HA						
	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
Kg/LW/HA*	700-1,000	1,000-1,500	1,400-2,000	1,750-2,500	2,100-3,000	2,450-3,500	2,800-4,000
Kg/LW/Ac*	280-400	420-600	560-800	700-1,000	850-1,200	1,000-1,400	1,100-1,600

*during period of poor utilisation, use figures at the lower end of the range.

BETTER FARM WALK

James Madigan, Ballyhale, Co Kilkenny

Derrynahinch,
Ballyhale,
Co Kilkenny



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This autumn, the BETTER Farm programme will host four regional farm walks. The focus of the walks is managing autumn grass and setting the farm up for spring grazing again. In addition, the events will focus on preparing calves for weaning and winter feeding of store and finishing cattle. The first event will be hosted by James Madigan on his 62ha farm near Ballyhale, Kilkenny, on 4 September. James runs 82 suckler cows split into spring and autumn calving. Before joining the programme, he sold all progeny as stores.

As part of his farm plan, developed with the help of programme adviser Peter Lawrence and local B&T adviser Austin Flavin, the decision was made to take all cattle through to slaughter

with males finished as steers.

Herd details

Spring calving consists of 44 cows calving from early January to early March, with 38 autumn cows calving from August to September.

Both herds calve inside a 10-week period with a calving index of 378 days. Cows are served by two Charolais stock bulls, one bred by CF52 and a new herd sire bred by Major, who has just had his second calf crop hit the ground in 2014.

Autumn calving commenced on 1 August and, to date, 28 cows have calved with 28 calves on the ground. Two calves died at birth but with two cows having twins, they were able to be fostered with little trouble.

Autumn cows were weaned in early June and placed on restricted grazing. They were housed briefly before calving and offered a mix of straw and silage before returning to top-quality grass. Meal

will be introduced at housing and removed once settled in-calf.

Spring cows are weaned around 1 October. Cows and calves are weaned in two batches by splitting them into two groups and dividing with fencing or housing.

Target weaning weights for spring calves is 350kg liveweight and has been achieved in the past few years.

In 2013, spring calves were weaned and housed at an average of 364kg liveweight. In 2014, spring bull calves were weighed on 21 August and averaged 291kg, which is a daily gain of 1.33kg since birth.

Cow type is mainly Simmental cross. Heifers are sourced at 18 months from a neighbouring dairy farm.

The dairy cross Simmental heifers come onto the farm having received a full vaccination programme. James breeds these heifers to calve into the autumn herd.



Autumn-born steers will be finished in mid-September having consumed less than 500kg of concentrates in their lifetime.

Replacement heifers for the spring herd are then retained from the autumn herd.

The combination of milk and good continental genetics allows James to achieve high levels of weight gain from grass, which suits his heifer and steer finishing system.

Both factors remove a lot of the added costs normally associated with autumn and early spring calving.

While the farm is naturally dry, being able to exploit the full potential of grass, milky cows and genetics comes down to the herd manager, as many farms possess similar

resources, but have cattle that are consistently under-performing or too reliant on concentrates.

Steer system

As James works full-time off-farm and the farm is split into two land blocks, he prefers the steer system, as it offers simplicity in terms of management.

James's management is top class, so harnessing this as cheap liveweight gain over two seasons makes the steer system more economically viable.

The dry nature of his land allows for an eight-month grazing season, which ena-

bles cattle to put on close to 200kg of liveweight from grass.

Autumn steers will be finished off grass by late September at 23 to 24 months of age. Spring steers are housed in late September to early October and finished by Christmas.

Given the cost of intensive indoor feeding, James does not see the benefit of storing cattle through the first half of winter to finish them in March to May.

Weight gain

In 2013, a group of 14 spring steers went to grass on 16 March weighing 382kg. These



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DATES FOR DIARY

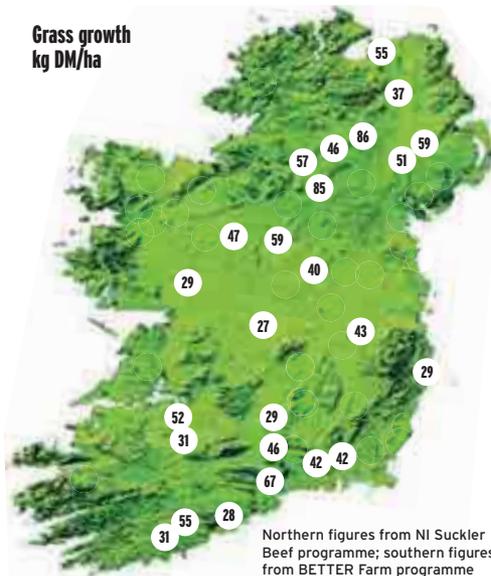
Regional autumn farmwalk series

- **Thursday 4 September** - James Madigan, Ballyhale, Co Kilkenny
 - **Wednesday 10 September** - Chris McCarthy, Mullingar, Co Westmeath
 - **Thursday 11 September** - Ger Dineen, Macroom, Co Cork
 - **Tuesday 16 September** - David Mitchell, Shercock, Co Monaghan
- Walks will be held at 2pm and 6pm

➤ To ensure there is adequate grass for autumn grazing, increase the rotation length by one to two days every week during September. This should mean that the target rotation length is around 30 days by the start of October.



Grass growth kg DM/ha



FARMER FOCUS

Willie Treacy Co Louth

I finished off the second-cut silage last Monday with 45 acres of good leafy grass cut and ensiled in the pit. It was cut and lifted dry. It also got a short wilt, so I would be hoping that the quality will be in the mid-70s DMD.

With more cattle being finished on-farm, good silage is helping to replace meal during the growing phase. Second-cut silage got 2,300 gallons of slurry and 75 units of nitrogen, plus 15 units of sulphur.

I was tight for silage last winter, but this year, I have managed to get approximately 1,300t saved over the two cuts. This

should see me comfortably through to March of next year. In addition, I bought 130



round bales of hay in June, as well as straw for feeding dry cows and finishing bulls.

The autumn cows have been calving thick and fast since the final few days of July. To date, I have 42 calved with 14 to go. There are eight heifers calved who are joining the autumn herd this year. They calved to an easy calving maternal Limousin bull.

The cows are calving to my Belgian Blue and Charolais stock bulls, as well as a Simmental to breed some replacements, but I am mostly getting bull calves from him. Dry cows are on a bare paddock and being offered hay with minerals.

Last year's autumn-born bulls were housed on 10 July for finishing. This was in the middle of a dry spell from 12 June to 1 August, which limited grass growth.

Housing the bulls gave more ground for cows. They would all weigh between 500kg to 550kg and are eating an ad-lib diet of meal and hay. The ration is made up of one-third barley, one-third maize meal and one-third distillers. It cost €205/t delivered and minerals are added on-farm, along with a rumen buffer. The bulls will be killed under 16 months.



James Madigan and programme adviser Peter Lawrence.

steers due to finish in late September. They weighed 531kg at turnout in early March and 646kg on 28 June, which is a gain of 0.97kg/day. Meal was introduced three weeks ago at 3kg/day of a 14% finishing nut.

The autumn steers will be finished on approximately 200kg of meal (€240/t) at a cost of €48/head. These calves consumed a similar quantity of meal last winter, which means that the total lifetime meal fed to autumn-born steers, including the meal fed to their dam at housing, is approximately 500kg in total.

Grassland management

Having top-class genetics is pointless if you are not feeding animals to realise their potential. This can be achieved with concentrates at high cost or with good grass at low cost.

Over the past seven years, the entire farm has been reseeded. Rotational grazing with paddocks means that all cattle are constantly moving to good-quality grass throughout the year.

Silage ground is rotated annually, which prevents soil fertility being depleted

through repeated cutting on the same land.

Soil pH for the farm is at the ideal range of 6.0 to 6.3 and potassium (K) levels are at the ideal levels of index 2 or greater. Phosphate (P) levels are low, so compounds such as 10:10:20 are used regularly, along with sulphacAN due to lighter soils on the farm.

Young swards are more responsive to fertilizer and can support higher stocking rates. This year, the autumn and spring steers grazed together in a group of 32 animals on 18 acres.

Taking an average mid-season weight of 600kg for the autumn steers and 500kg for the spring steers, this works out at 961kg liveweight/acre, or 2,373kg liveweight/ha.

Assuming that both groups continue to achieve 1kg liveweight/day until 1 September, the cattle will have gained 184kg from grass. Across the group, this amounts to 5,888kg of liveweight produced.

Taking five bags of CAN (€300/t) and two bags/acre of 10:10:20 (€380), the cost per kilogramme of liveweight gain to date is approximately €0.35/kg.

cattle excelled at grass despite the difficult spring.

The steers were housed on 1 October at an average liveweight of 640kg, which is a gain of 258kg over 199 days, or 1.3kg/day at grass. The group was slaughtered at Christmas at an average of 405kg carcass weight, having gained 1.6kg liveweight/day once housed.

This year, 19 spring yearlings went to grass in mid-March at an average of 413kg having gained 0.52kg/day over winter on a silage diet.

By 28 June, the group averaged 535kg and averaged 1kg/day from grass. Steers were weighed on 21 August

and averaged 577kg at 18 months of age.

Once housed, steers will be finished on 15kg silage and 6kg of ration. Silage fed last winter was 76 DMD, 34% dry matter and 12.2% protein.

As James makes his own silage, he has greater control over cutting date, which helps with quality.

Silage from 2014 has yet to be analysed, but based on current prices and 2013 results, the finishing diet will cost approximately €1.82/kg, taking silage at €25/t and ration at €240/t.

This year is the first year that autumn steers will be killed off-farm. There are 13

Michael Smith Co Cavan

The second-cut silage finished up last week with 60 bales made from 10 acres. I made a small second-cut as the first-cut gave excellent yields and I had been making bales from surplus grass over the summer.

Fodder stocks are more than adequate. I budget for a five-month winter from November and, with some good dry ground close by the yard, I can keep weanlings out late or get out reasonably early in March.

There should still be a good buffer of silage in reserve but hopefully it will not be needed.

My autumn herd has 18 cows and they started calving three weeks ago. To date, there are 12 cows calved and the remaining six are all due to calve within the next fortnight.

In the past, I had some trouble with pneumonia in the autumn calves. This year, I am being proactive and vaccinating the calves from three weeks old using an intra-nasal vaccine.

All being well, the calves will be out at grass until 1 November, which will give plenty of

time for immunity to build up.

The spring calves were also vaccinated for pneumonia this year. I think it was worthwhile as the disease gave calves a serious setback in previous years. Spring calves are also due to be wormed again.

The strongest spring bull weanlings will be sold this autumn and creep feeding will start on 1 September. The later-born bull calves and heifer calves will be carried over the winter and grazed again next year to sell as strong stores. This worked very well this year.

I sold the stores recently from 480kg to 515kg liveweight at €2.30/kg.

The spring cows were scanned and 31 out of 33 are in-calf in a nine-week breeding season. One cow is barren and

the other cow is showing in-calf but is a problem cow and will most likely be culled.

