

Teagasc Dairy Beef Programme

Update, Johnstown Castle

Date of writing: 4th May 2018

Covering period: March - April 2018

The weather remained poor for March and April, with unseasonal snow, severely cold and wet conditions. This meant that cattle remained indoors right up to the last week of April.

Like the rest of the country, Johnstown castle experienced a major fodder shortage. Although silage had been plentiful, it began to run out towards the end of March meaning the trial cattle had to be supplemented with straw and meal. The trial yearlings were fed 6.5 kg of meal alongside some silage and straw, and the two year olds steers were fed 8.5 kg meal and some silage and straw for almost 4 weeks. After this, they were fed meal and straw only for 7-10 days before eventually being able to turn them out to grass.

The cold soil conditions meant there was little grass growth until start of April, however since then grass growth has accelerated and many paddocks have had to be put aside for silage.

Table 1 Total rainfall and mean temperatures for March and April 2018.

	March 2018	April 2018
Rainfall (ml)	169.8	125
Mean temp (°C)	4.9	8.6
Mean 10cm soil temperature (°C)	4.3	8.7

Animal performance:

2 year old steers

- The performance of the steers over the spring period has fluctuated due to the fodder shortage. They had been performing well on their diet of *ad lib* grass silage only. They stayed performing well with a diet of meal, silage and straw, however their performance started to lag when the silage ran out completely.
- Weights were not taken in February and March for the 2 year old steers because of the building of the new handling facility. The cattle were weighed on the 19th April, where they averaged 555 kg.
- The cattle were turned out to grass on the 26th April, and reweighed 4 days post turnout.

Table 2 Performance of 2-year-old steers, liveweight (LW) and average daily gain (ADG).

	LW 19/04/2018 (kg)	LW 26/04/2018 (kg)	LW 01/05/2018 (kg)	ADG 2 nd Season (kg/day)
High	536	526	535	0.441
Medium	579	573	574	0.583
Low	552	560	558	0.469

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Weanlings

- 107 yearlings (stronger yearlings, housed on slats) were turned out to grass on 21st March, averaging 314 kg. They grazed in small groups of <20 animals in order to limit poaching.
- These animals were rehoused on 3rd April due to the poor ground conditions and poor grass growth.
- Late April, all the yearlings were turned out to grass. These were let out on two separate days; the cattle housed on straw were turned out the 20th April and the cattle housed on slats (stronger yearlings) were turned out the 23rd April. These were reweighed on the 24th and 26th April, respectively.

Table 3 Yearling performance, LW and ADG.

	First Turnout 21/03/2018 (LW, kg)	Rehoused 03/04/2018 (LW, kg)	Second turnout (20 & 23 April) (LW, kg)	4-Day Reweigh (24 & 26 April) (LW, kg)	ADG, first winter (kg/day)
High	315	296	325	319	0.691
Medium	312	292	325	318	0.680
Low	315	299	340	325	0.740

Grass Management

- Grass growth rates for March were very low and did not rise above 5 kg DM/ha/day for most of the month. The latest farm cover showed growth rates of ~50 kg DM/ha/day.
- The aim is to have pre grazing yields of 1500-1600 kg DM/ha.
- Many paddocks have become too strong to graze and have been put aside to cut for silage. Some of these will need to be mowed soon in order to have the paddocks back into rotation as soon as possible.
- All paddocks are being strip grazed to maximise grass utilisation. This is important in particular on paddocks with heavy covers (18-1900 kg DM/ha).
- All paddocks are being yielded and sampled for DM% prior to grazing.

Table 4 Pasture Base Ireland grass growth and farm cover data.

		Growth/ha (kg DM/ha/day)	Demand/ha (kg DM/ha/day)	Farm cover (kg DM/ha)	LU/ ha	Days ahead	Silage (ha)
16th March	High	0	0	1098	0	0	0
	Medium	0	0	1030	0	0	0
	Low	0	0	1026	0	0	0
9th April	High	9	0	1035	0	0	0
	Medium	7	0	1057	0	0	0
	Low	9	0	1074	0	0	0

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20th April	High	30	21	1290	2.33	61	0
	Medium	34	20	1379	2.24	69	0
	Low	37	18	1430	1.95	79	0
30th April	High	34	56	1053	5.6	19	6.24
	Medium	40	53	1218	5.31	23	7.25
	Low	36	45	1283	4.58	29	7.0
4th May	High	49	56	1018	5.6	18	6.24
	Medium	54	53	1109	5.31	21	7.25
	Low	47	53	1143	5.37	22	9.78



Health

- After a poor start for some of the 2017 calves in June, the weaker yearlings were housed on straw over the winter. This has brought on their performance and condition greatly. They remain ~50 kg lighter on average than the stronger yearlings.
- Apart from one 2 year old steer that was lost randomly to meningitis, the health of the cattle has been good over the extended housing period.