

# BETTERfarm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

## Farms use faecal samples to decide on fluke treatment



**KIERAN MAILEY**  
LIVESTOCK SPECIALIST

**H**eavy rainfall last week has led to more cattle being housed on the programme farms. Finishing the final grazing rotation has coincided with the heavy rainfall, pushing cattle indoors to prevent ground damage.

In the north-west and south-east of the country, approximately 90% of the cattle on farm are housed.

In the south-west, ground conditions are slightly better and approximately 80% of the cattle on-farms are housed. In the south-east region, approximately 60% of cattle are now housed.

The cattle that are still at grass are a mix of autumn-born calves and spring-born weanlings, autumn calved cows with the bull or, in a few cases, some cull cows are at grass and being fed for slaughter in the coming weeks.

Grazing these paddocks

as best as possible before all stock are housed is important. Leaving a heavy cover of grass over winter will lead to a build-up of dead grass in the sward.

Heavy covers will prevent slurry being spread once the closed period ends which will be a problem if storage is reaching full capacity.

**“The samples provide a firm indication on whether or not treatment is required.”**

### FLUKE

Over the past few weeks, dung samples have been taken on the farms to monitor for fluke. From the sample results to date, there is a considerable presence of both liver and rumen fluke in cattle.

Over the past few years, there has been much written on rumen fluke and as it has only one active product ingredient for effective treatment, there is a risk of over-using the product and developing resistance.

The samples provide a firm indication on whether or not treatment is required.

Using the results from the

dung samples will indicate if a treatment is required at present, or whether to leave and treat at a later time.

Most of the farms are opting to treat for mature liver fluke around six to eight weeks after housing, with all cattle being treated on the same day.

When using a flukicide, the advice being given to the farms is to set the dosing rate to the heaviest animal in the group.

That way, all cattle will receive adequate cover.

### CALF HEALTH

A few farms are reporting a couple of cases of hoose

in calves, but, by and large, the strategic worming programmes drawn up for the farms have helped to reduce respiratory problems.

Using pneumonia vaccines and following best practice at weaning and housing have also helped to reduce the risk.

When housing, it is important that autumn calves are not sharing the same air space as older weanlings as there is a disease risk from increased exposure levels.

The programme farms are providing autumn calves with access to external yards and on/off grazing to improve calf health.



## ON THE GROUND BILLY GLASHEEN

**“To generate a profit from beef finishing, the purchase price of the animal must relate to beef price.”**

**O**perating a store to beef system requires a different set of management skills than those used in a suckler cow system. As cattle are mainly purchased in the mart, knowing the purchase value when trading in cattle can make or break the system.

To generate a profit from beef finishing, the purchase price of the animal must relate to beef price. This is where the different skill set comes in to play. Buying cattle without paying over the odds is not as easy as it sounds.

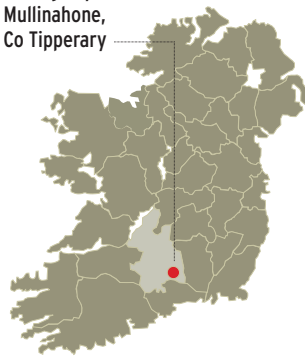
It is easy to get carried away when bidding on an animal in the ring, especially if you need cattle to fill out the house.

That extra €50 needed for the hammer to fall might not seem excessive when standing around the ring, but it requires an extra €0.14/kg on a 350kg carcass when trying to agree a price with the factory agent.

### FARM DETAILS

Billy Glasheen operates a

Ballinagarry,  
Mullinahone,  
Co Tipperary



store to beef finishing system near Mullinahone. He farms 41ha of grassland, of which 12ha is used for silage.

In 2012, Billy slaughtered 156 cattle which were predominantly Angus x Friesian steers. The average carcass weight was 320kg at 27 months of age. The farm will slaughter a similar number in 2013.

Around two thirds of the cattle were slaughtered off grass from 26 June to 7 October in 2013, with the remainder to be killed out of the house from January to April.

Under the BETTER Farm programme, Billy has developed a farm plan with

the help of B&T adviser Joe Hand and programme adviser Alan Dillon to increase numbers to 250 cattle slaughtered annually.

### OUTPUT

In 2012, the farm had a stocking rate of 1.87LU/ha and had an output per hectare of 692kg of liveweight. Increasing numbers to 250 will push the stocking rate up to 2.4LU/ha. Once the system reaches its optimum stocking rate, the farm will be producing in the region of 900kg of liveweight per hectare.

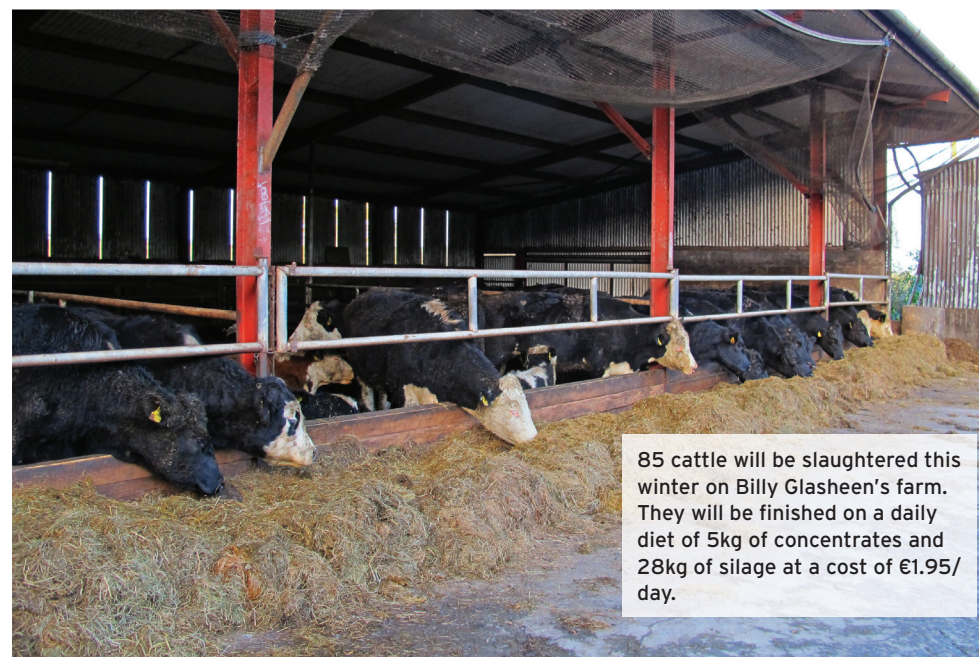
### INCREASING OUTPUT

To increase the cattle throughput from current levels to 250, it is important that the herd grows gradually. There will be a number of infrastructure and management changes required first.

Without these changes, such an increase in numbers will overload the system and it will become unsustainable. For Billy, the following changes are being made first:

### 1. SOIL FERTILITY

Soil samples have been taken



85 cattle will be slaughtered this winter on Billy Glasheen's farm. They will be finished on a daily diet of 5kg of concentrates and 28kg of silage at a cost of €1.95/day.

across the farm and the analysis indicates that soils are low in phosphates but fine for potash. A fertilizer plan is in place to increase soil fertility so that sufficient grass can be produced to carry the stock.

### 2. GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

Reseeding and drainage are another aspect of making land more productive to carry the higher stock numbers. Splitting grazing ground into paddocks is helping to increase grass quality which will support a higher daily liveweight gain.

### 3. BUY HEAVIER CATTLE

Billy normally buys his cattle in spring at a target liveweight of 350kg, in summer at 400kg and in autumn at 450kg. The plan now will be to increase the purchase weight of each cattle group by an average of 50kg liveweight. Heavier cattle will increase the number of cattle

finished off grass and reduce the intensive feeding period during winter. More cattle will be slaughtered over winter and additional housing has been provided for this.

### PURCHASING CATTLE

As one group of cattle is slaughtered, Billy replaces them automatically with young stores.

This autumn, 96 cattle have been bought at an average liveweight of 418kg at €859 per head (€2.06/kg).

From February to July, 51 cattle were bought at an average weight of 363kg at €758/head (€2.09/kg). They were purchased in nine batches which are outlined in *Table 1*.

Billy owns his own weighbridge and is a firm believer in regular weighing to monitor performance.

A problem with rumen fluke this autumn has hindered liveweight gain from

July to October. The herd had a similar problem last year.

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

The 51 cattle have been grazed at two animals per acre, which required an area of 26 acres. The grazing area received 145kg/ha of nitrogen this year, which is 116 units per acre.

At an average fertilizer price of €380/tonne, there was approximately €85/acre of nitrogen spread.

Although cattle were turned out in February, they were re-housed in March due to the weather.

The grazing season resumed in May and lasted for approximately 190 days.

Taking the cattle groups that were on the farm from





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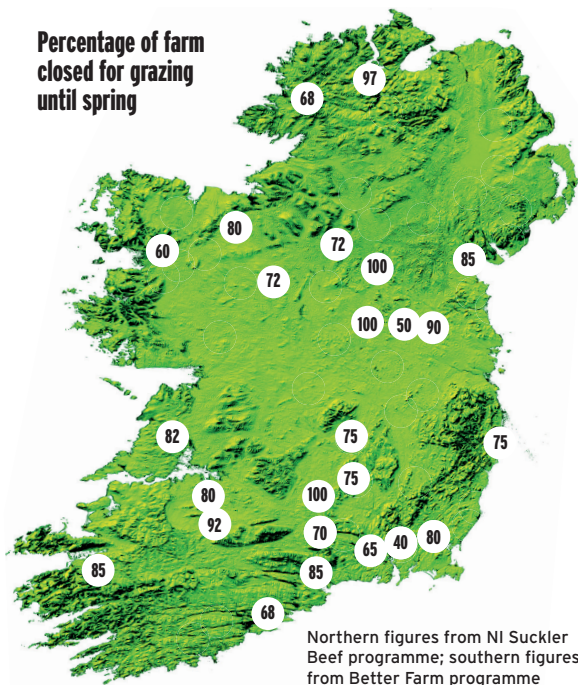
## WEEK IN REVIEW

- ➔ Up to 90% of cattle have been housed after heavy rainfall last week.
- ➔ Only autumn cows with the bull, weanling calves and some cull cows remain at grass.
- ➔ Faecal samples indicate the presence of liver fluke and rumen fluke on some farms.
- ➔ Treatment will depend on egg counts to prevent resistance developing.
- ➔ Some farms have had a few isolated cases of hoose.

➔ As cattle finishing diets increase in the level of concentrates, it is important to provide fresh, clean water. Roughly speaking, cattle on an ad-lib system will require six litres of water for every 1kg of dry matter consumed. Clean the trough out regularly.

TOP TIP

Percentage of farm closed for grazing until spring



Northern figures from NI Suckler Beef programme; southern figures from Better Farm programme

turnout in May until housing, they averaged approximately 130kg of liveweight from grass which is a daily gain of 0.69kg/day.

At two steers per acre, the grazing cost for Billy's cattle was €0.33 per kg of liveweight gain based on fertilizer costs.

## WINTER MANAGEMENT

Cattle have now been housed for winter feeding. Cattle over 500kg will be separated for finishing, with cattle below 480kg stored for an early turnout in February. They will then be slaughtered off grass in June.

The plan is to kill 85 cattle out of the shed next spring with 85 cattle to go back to grass. However, Billy is flexible in the management of the herd. If more cattle have potential to be killed out of the shed, then the plan will be adjusted to suit.

Table 2 outlines the winter feeding plan on the farm. Silage was made in three cuts and surplus grass was baled twice. The silage analysis for each cut is outlined in Table 3.

The 170 cattle have a feed demand of 823 tonnes of silage. With 700 tonnes of pit silage and 170 round bales, there is sufficient fodder in store. Silage cost €22/tonne to make this year while the concentrate ration is a 14% protein finishing nut costing €265/tonne.

The finishing cattle are on a daily diet of 28kg of silage plus 5kg of ration which will cost €1.95/day to feed.

The cattle will be finished over a 100-day period, bringing the winter feeding costs to €195/head.

As the cattle are dairy

Table 1: Purchased cattle groups at grass in 2013

Purchase date	No of cattle	Purchase weight (kg)	Purchase price (€)	Wgt 25 July (kg)	Av DLWG (kg/day)*	Wgt 2 Oct (kg)	Av DLWG (kg/day)*
18/2/13	12	275	600	425	0.96	457	0.48
28/2/13	4	380	802	456	0.52	470	0.22
13/4/13	6	368	809	452	0.82	492	0.59
27/4/13	1	325	750	414	1.35	471	0.38
2/5/13	6	411	819	505	1.13	519	0.21
17/5/13	6	437	871	498	0.89	523	0.38
31/5/13	4	350	796	408	1.06	421	0.20
7/6/13	5	378	741	426	1.01	438	0.19
25/7/13	7	400	790	0	0	396	-0.05
Average	51	366	774	448	0.97	466	0.29

\* Average daily gain from previous weighing

Table 2: Winter feeding plan and silage supplies available

	No of cattle	kg conc/day	kg silage/day	Days indoors	Silage required (tonnes)
Finishing cattle	85	5	28	165	370
Store cattle	85	0	41	123	454
Total	170				823
Pit silage					700 tonnes
Round bales					170 bales

Table 3: Silage analysis in 2013

	1st cut - pit silage	2nd cut - pit silage	3rd cut - pit silage	Round bales	Round bales
Cut date	26/5/13	13/7/13	13/9/13	25/6/13	25/8/13
Dry matter (%)	30.5	29.2	23.9	34.2	25.4
Protein (%)	11.5	12.3	13.5	13	16.1
Energy (MJ ME)	11	10.9	10.7	10.9	11.2
DMD	69	70	69	69	72

bred, they have a lower kill-out than continental cattle. Typically, Billy's cattle will achieve 51% kill-out in the winter and at grass.

At an O+ price of €3.90/kg, the cattle are generating an income of €1.99/day before any QA premia or Angus bonus is included. As feed costs are just about covered, it is important Billy markets the cattle as soon as they reach the correct finish.

The cattle that will go back to grass will be fed a silage-

only diet with an average of 41kg of fodder consumed daily.

At €22/tonne, the store diet will cost €0.90/day with a target daily liveweight gain of 0.5kg to 0.6kg per day.

While these cattle will be killed at a lower price, they have a lower cost of production.

For Billy, killing cattle all year round gives him greater scope to negotiate a better price with his factory which is one of the big advantages

of operating a specialised finishing system.

## ADVISER COMMENT

"Billy is purchasing dairy bred cattle and can get great value for money. With his system, the key area for success is getting the volume of supply and there is a good supply of these cattle in the area. Keeping the system simple and focussing on getting low cost gain off grass is one of the strengths of his system" – Alan Dillon.

## FARMER FOCUS

Sean Power  
Co Kilkenny

To date, approximately 75% of my farm is now closed for grazing next spring. I started to close my driest and most sheltered paddocks in mid-October and, therefore, weather permitting, I hope to turn cattle back out to these paddocks by the end of February.

The last of the heifers (350kg to 440kg) were housed last week. The mild weather led to good grass growth in October so I operated a leader-follower system by getting store lambs to graze out paddocks after the heifers. This worked very well as I avoided damaging swards during spells of heavy rain.

We are starting to kill the store lambs. I slaughtered 90 last week and hope to kill 40 to 50 lambs each week from now until late February.

We increased our winter housing capacity this year by building a slatted tank/feeding area in front of an existing straw bedded shed. The existing shed is now acting as a

lie-back area and is working really well.

We started housing cattle in early October with the heaviest heifers brought in first for intensive feeding. These heifers were initially fed first cut grass silage, straw and 7kg of concentrates made up of rolled barley, soya hulls and distillers.

I am buying in fodder beet this winter. Over the last three weeks, I have gradually introduced it into the ration. The finishers are now on 7kg of concentrates, 10kg of fodder beet and 12kg of silage and straw.

I hope to start killing from these 150 heifers in the next 10 days and finish up by mid-December. I will then replace them by buying in 15 to 16-month-old heifers weighing approximately 400kg with the aim of killing them off grass from next July onwards.

My heavy store cattle (480kg to 520kg) are being fed 4kg of fodder beet, 2kg concentrates and approximately 20kg of silage. Light weanlings are being stored on ad-lib silage with 1.5kg of concentrates.

Richard  
Williamson  
Co Meath

We have finished weaning calves and all animals have settled again after the stress of weaning. All cows are still outdoors working their way through some heavy grass covers.

Spring 2012 heifers that are close to finishing have been housed, as have a mix of steers and bulls so that meal levels can be increased. All weanlings have been housed.

I was toying with the idea of letting the heifer calves back outside to increase grazing demand but I have not done so.

Weather conditions have been less favourable in the last few days and I am working off farm, hence if there are any problems in the field, it is more difficult to sort things out.

I have about 45% of the grazing ground closed at the moment which is a little behind

where I would like it to be.

I am working through covers nicely and it is a real bonus to be still grazing cows in the second week of November. We had good scanning results with three cows out of 92 not in calf. These cows are currently being fattened along with the heifers.

We took some faecal samples this week from a number of animals that have been housed to determine fluke prevalence and we will then dose accordingly.

We weighed our bull calves on 29 October and they weighed 313kg and gained 1.17kg/day since birth. We will now divide this group into a group of steers and bulls, with the heavier calves being picked for bull beef.

Weanlings are currently on round bale silage (silage has been sampled and we are awaiting results) and 2kg of a ration costing €260/tonne.

Bull weanlings destined for bull beef will be stepped up onto 5kg in the next few weeks. Our group of steers are a little bit behind where we would like, weighing 504kg on 29 October. They will be finished in December.

