

BETTERfarm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

On behalf of the *Irish Farmers Journal*, Teagasc and programme stakeholders, we would like to wish a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year to the programme farmers and their families.



Winter feeding of cattle will vary from farm to farm based on animal type and size, silage quality and ration type. Diets should be balanced in order to meet nutritional demand.

Winter feeding management in full swing



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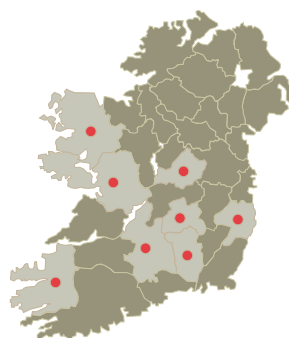
The winter period is that time of the year when animal performance of weanlings and replacement

heifers can be overlooked. Likewise, cows calving indoors will have additional feed requirements in order to maintain body condition, produce milk and to go back in-calf.

As silage quality varies from first-cut to second-cut, and from year to year, having the same winter feeding regime will not meet the nutritional requirements of the herd.

Over the Christmas period, we will feature all the programme farms and what

is happening on them in relation to winter feeding and management of livestock.



BILLY GILMORE

GALWAY

Autumn calving cows are being fed second-cut baled silage. They are also fed 1kg of home-grown, rolled barley to ensure they have enough energy in their diet during the breeding period. The silage analysis came back at 78 DMD and 15% protein. The calves have restricted access to the cows during the day. As a result, I find the cows are quick to come back in heat and this allows me to achieve a compact calving season. The calves are being fed 0.75kg/head/day of a home mix consisting of barley, pulp, soya and minerals. I have 10 weanling heifers out grazing due to the mild autumn weather and good grass covers. The replacement heifers, which have been served to easy calving Blue and Limousin sires, are currently getting ad-lib silage. The ewes are still grazing and will be housed just before lambing.





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**MICHAEL DILLANE****KERRY**

Silage quality is good this year. My first-cut came in at 72 DMD and my baled silage at 69 DMD. I also made a cut of stronger silage, which was 62 DMD, for feeding cows pre-calving. I am finishing bulls for the first time this year. They are on 10kg per day of a 13% protein ration, consisting of 70% maize and barley. The bulls are also on ad-lib 69 DMD baled silage made from newly reseeded grass in August. I plan to finish these bulls around 1 March. Recently, five heifers were finished off grass, at 12 months of age. They were fed intensively for the final month using a creep feeder in the field and averaged 500kg liveweight when killed. They were brought home in August from the mart due to the cattle being poor trade. They left substantially more money when finished compared with selling live. Fifteen yearling heifers are on ad-lib 69 DMD silage, minerals and 1kg of ration and will go to grass in early February. Autumn calving cows are on 1.5kg of bull ration, topped up with soya to bring the protein to 15%. They are on 69 DMD silage until mating is finished. Dry cows are on 62 DMD silage and minerals until calving. Young calves have access to grass around the shed and are also eating approximately 0.5kg of ration daily.

**DAVID WALSH****TIPPERARY**

I have an abundance of silage this winter and only housed spring calving cows on 11 December. They had been cleaning out paddocks after the weanlings since they were dried off in September. They will be fed baled silage, 69 DMD, on a restricted basis as they have a BCS of 3.0. I will continue to monitor BCS and feed cows accordingly. The suckler weanlings will all be fed 1.5kg of ration along with ad-lib 70 DMD silage. Dairy bred Limousin heifer calves, that will be bulled next year, will be fed 2kg of ration plus ad-lib 70 DMD baled silage. The ration is a 0.94 UFL and 16% protein. The main ingredients of the ration are barley, citrus and distillers. The thrive on my weanlings has been a lot better this year, with weanlings being over 40kg heavier on average than the same day last year. They will be fed meal until late January. They will go out to grass in mid to late February as I have good covers of grass coming back on ground that was closed up early. Cows will receive no meal at any stage on the farm. I assessed the weight of replacement heifers and feel they have adequate weight for their age. My 20 acres of pit silage came in at 65 DMD, which was slightly lower than expected given how well it looked at harvesting. Depending on the spring, however, I may leave this silage to carry over to next year as a reserve.

**JAMES MADIGAN****KILKENNY**

All spring calving cows were housed in early December. The mild weather helped to keep the cows out longer than usual as silage supplies on the farm are tight, so I am trying to stretch it out as best I can. They are now being fed bales from a crop of spring barley undersown with grass seed and are on about 50:50 grass/straw. Cows are supplemented with pre-calving minerals and vitamins. The autumn calved cows were housed in mid-November and are on slats with rubber mats and are being fed second-cut silage (66 DMD) and 2kg of concentrates. Their calves are behind them in a separate straw bedded creep area and are getting 1kg of concentrates. My 2013 weanlings and 2012 yearlings are being fed four bales of first cut silage (76 DMD) and one bale of grass/straw every three days. They are supplemented with 2kg of concentrates daily. The finishing bullocks are fed the first-cut bales and 5kg of concentrates, which is mostly comprised of maize meal, rolled barley and distillers and costs €275/t delivered. All stock groups are fed this concentrate mix for simplicity.

**BILLY GLASHEEN****TIPPERARY**

All finishing stock are eating about 5kg/day of a beef finishing nut. The recent weighing has shown them to be gaining around 1.2kg per day on 70 DMD silage, plus the ration. All store cattle are on ad-lib 70 DMD silage only until turnout in February.

Weighing has shown stores to be gaining 0.62kg per head per day. The nut I am feeding is 0.92 UFV with about 14% protein. It is a high maize/barley nut. I find using a nut easier than a ration as it is less dusty in the meal shed and when feeding with a power box on the tractor it is less bulky to handle.

This system of finishing steers on good quality silage and 5kg ration is a new venture for me as I used to always build stock up to ad-lib for the finishing period, with straw as a roughage source. This new system is working out cheaper and more efficient per kg of carcass gain than the ad-lib diet. I aim to slaughter about 85 head out of the shed this way over the winter period with the 85 stores being slaughtered from next June onwards off grass.

**TOMAS MURPHY****LAOIS**

Silage yields were lower than normal this year for the pit silage due to the delayed spring growth and extremely dry weather. However, silage analysis indicates that silage quality is excellent. The first-cut was harvested on 5 June and is 81 DMD, 13.9% protein and 22.5% DM. I also made a lot of baled silage any chance I could get by removing surplus grass from the grazing platform. The intensive rotational paddock system really helped grow extra grass. The second-cut was cut on 4 August and was put in front of the first-cut silage in the pit. According to the analysis it is 65 DMD, 12.8% protein and 30.8% DM. I am currently feeding second-cut to the weanlings, but I am now close to the first-cut. They are also being supplemented with 2kg of concentrates which is comprised of 60% rolled barley and 40% of a 22% protein balancer. I purchased the barley off the combine this harvest, stored and rolled it myself. The balancer is made up of wheat distillers, soya hulls, citrus pulp, dried flake maize, soya bean meal, molasses, mineral and vitamins and costs €300/tonne. My finishing heifers will be fit early in the new year and are being fed ad-lib silage plus 5kg of the barley balancer mix described. Cows are fed second-cut ad-lib silage supplemented with minerals and vitamins. I also have hay and straw that I could feed to the cows if silage supplies are tight later in the spring.

**CHRIS MCCARTHY****WESTMEATH**

Following a mild autumn, all spring calving cows were housed by 1 November with an average body condition score of 3.0 to 3.5. I am very satisfied with their condition this year. Currently they are being fed silage and straw ad-lib with 100g/cow pre-calving minerals and vitamins. I was disappointed with the silage analysis result, despite excellent conditions at harvest. The silage fields were closed up in early April and cut on 7 June. My silage analysis came back at 66 DMD and 11.5 % protein. Last year, I fed 0.5kg of soya bean meal per day to cows for about six weeks before calving.

Cows seemed to have more colostrum and calves were stronger and hardier at birth. I plan to repeat this in spring 2014, but as silage protein is higher this year, I will feed 0.25kg per head per day to cows for four weeks pre-calving. The cows are due to start calving from 15 January, which is a fortnight earlier than last year. As part of my three-year plan, I am moving the calving date forward to have heavier weanlings to sell in autumn. In the past, I kept heifers over the winter, but this year all the weanlings were sold in the autumn.

**SEAN COUGHLAN****MAYO**

Spring calving cows are being fed 64 DMD pit silage ad-lib, which I cut at the end of June. They are also getting 100g of pre-calving minerals and vitamins dusted on the silage.

The bulls that I intend to finish at 16 months have been built up onto ad-lib concentrates consisting of 37% barley, 20% maize, 20% soya hulls, 20% distillers, 2% molasses and 1% minerals and vitamins. They also have access to silage and straw.

I have the weanling bulls and heifers out grazing and they are being fed 2kg and 1kg, respectively, of the same ration. The hoggets are grazing off the wetter part of the farm at the moment as it will not be possible to graze it early next year.

The ewes are still with the ram and will be going to the hill in the new year.

**TREVOR MINION****WICKLOW**

All cows were housed in early November and are in good body condition score (3.0 to 3.25) due to the prolonged grazing season and good quality grass this year. As a result, I am feeding them second-cut silage that was baled and wrapped. I am alternating the poor and good quality silage with the cows. The first batch of bales was made in July and is 72 DMD. This is fed every second day. The poorer quality silage of 62 DMD was made in August and is fed on the other days. I also bed the cows with straw on the same day so the cows can pick through it. The weanlings are fed first-cut pit silage that was harvested in early June, and is 78 DMD and 13.7% crude protein. I am also feeding them 1kg of concentrate, which is comprised of 86% home grown rolled barley and 14% soya bean meal. I hope to grow them at 0.5 to 0.6kg per day over the store winter period. The finishing cattle (heifers and steers) and cull cows are fed the first-cut pit silage and 5kg of concentrates, which comprises of 86% home grown rolled barley and 12% soya bean meal. All animals are supplemented with minerals and vitamins.

