

BETTERfarm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH



Winter feeding is progressing well with few issues on the programme farms in terms of cow fertility, cow condition and weanling performance.

Winter feeding ongoing on farms

This week, we feature more of the winter feeding regimes on the farms in the BETTER Farm programme



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Cows that have been housed should be grouped and fed, according to body condition score (BCS). This involves getting into the pen and handling the animal, or running them through the crush. Whether you decide to stick to the five point scale, (BCS 1 = thin and BCS 5 = fat-test), there is a major benefit in taking action now to have cows in the ideal body condition at calving. Looking at an animal and assessing fat

covers is fine on a finishing steer, but cows are different.

The body condition in the final six weeks of the dry period will have an effect on the fertility of the cow after calving.

Thin cows (BCS 2 or lower) and first-calved heifers will take longer to start cycling again. Ideally, cows should come into heat around 40 days post calving. With thin cows, this is more likely to be around 60 days.

Remember, every missed cycle will add 21 days to the calving interval of the cow.

Furthermore, there is the cost of feeding that empty cow for 21 days.

A cow eating 45kg silage (€30/tonne), plus 2kg concentrates (€260/tonne), will be costing €1.87/day to feed. This amounts to €39 for every cycle that the cow missed. In addition, the calf will be

lighter when weaning next autumn.

Changing a cow by one BCS is the equivalent of gaining or losing 70kg to 80kg of liveweight. When gaining condition, a typical daily liveweight gain for a cow is 0.5kg/day. Therefore, bringing a January calving cow from BCS 2.5 to BCS 3 will take approximately six weeks. This is why action should be taken now. Trying to rapidly gain condition in the final month before calving will lead to the cow depositing fat internally, including the birth canal, which causes calving problems.

Feeding to gain condition

With dry cows, this is straightforward. Isolate thin cows (below BCS 2.5) and feed high quality silage (70+DMD) on an ad-lib basis.

With autumn-calving cows, remember that they will need extra energy for milk production so thin cows below BCS 2.5 should be fed ad lib 70+DMD silage and 3kg of concentrates.

With average quality silage (68 DMD), increase concentrates to 3kg for calved cows. Dry cows eating 66 to 68DMD should be eating ad-lib silage plus 1kg of concentrates.

Feeding to lose condition

Fat cows can also have a negative effect on fertility. Reducing BCS should also be carried out over the same period as gaining BCS to avoid metabolic problems. Restrict silage intakes by 5kg to 10kg, depending on silage quality. Silage should only be restricted to cows if there is sufficient feed space available for all cows to feed at the same time.

FRANK & DES BEIRNE

CO LONGFORD

The breeding season finished on 28 December. Any cows that repeat after this date will be culled. The autumn calved cows are being fed a total mixed ration. The breakdown of the cows TMR consists of 26kg silage, 0.25kg straw, 1kg barley, 0.3kg soya and post-calving mineral mix. The cows are costing €1.05/head/day to feed. They will be taken off the concentrates now that breeding has finished and I plan on increasing the silage rate. The calves are being fed 1kg of an 18% protein home-mixed ration. This will be increased to 1.5kg in January as it will compensate for the reduced milk yield in the cows. The spring-born bull and heifer weanlings are on 10kg silage per head per day. They are fed a 16% protein ration consisting of 1.5kg barley, 0.6kg soya, 0.25kg straw and 0.1kg minerals per head per day. They cost, on average, 77c per head to feed daily.

The silage analysis result was 69 DMD, with a protein level of 11.7%. I weighed the weanlings last week and the average daily gain for the bulls was 0.88kg/day and the heifers 0.85kg/day. I am very pleased with their performance.

RIGHT: Des Beirne



May we wish a happy and prosperous new year to the programme farms, their families and readers



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**JAMES KENNEALLY****CO CORK**

My 43 steers are being finished on a diet of 18kg of 69 DMD silage, 20kg beet, 0.5kg soya and 0.5kg straw. I will gradually introduce crimped barley into the diet from January and will build it up to 7kg per head. I am aiming to finish this group of stock around the end of March.

I have 79 weanling heifers being fed 14kg of 69 DMD silage, 10kg beet, 0.5kg soya and 0.5kg straw. The amount of beet being fed will be increased early in the New Year. I intend to slaughter these heifers out of the shed next May/June at a target carcase weight of 290kg.

Cows are on 27kg of 69 DMD silage, plus 4kg straw. As the protein content in my silage is low this year, I plan to introduce 0.5kg of soya as this will hopefully help increase the quality of the biestings when they start calving from the end of January.

**ADRIAN KELLY****CO OFFALY**

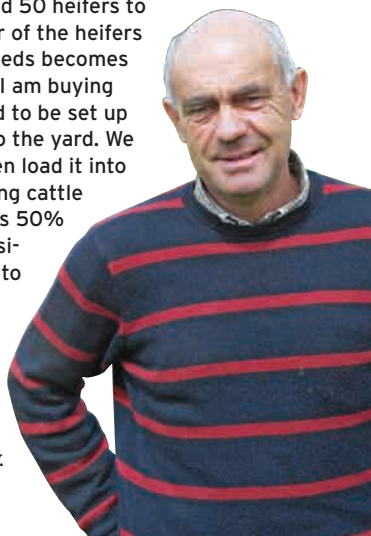
I have 22 heifers grazing rape this winter and they are performing well on it. Rape is high in protein, so no concentrate supplementation is being provided. They have access to 69 DMD baled silage as a roughage source. They have access to minerals in the form of a lick and were given a copper bolus earlier in autumn as I have a copper deficiency on the farm. I have 31 heifers indoors being fed 69 DMD pit silage plus 2kg per day of a 16% protein ration, which cost €275/tonne. Finishing bulls are on ad-lib meal, plus straw. It is a three-way mix consisting of 57% barley, 20% maize distillers, 17% soya hulls along with 5% molasses and minerals.

The spring cows are on ad-lib second cut silage plus straw and dry cow minerals. Autumn cows are on ad-lib first cut silage and no meal. I am attempting to get the autumn and spring herds to join and calve in one group to facilitate easier management, so I will let their calving date move into the new year in 2015.

**SEAN POWER****CO KILKENNY**

We are feeding 310 cattle on the farm this winter. I have killed 50 heifers to date and have another 150 on a finishing diet. The remainder of the heifers consist of heavy and light stores. As room in the finishing sheds becomes available, I will draft in the heavier store cattle for finishing. I am buying in fodder beet this year as I find it a great feed, but you need to be set up to handle it. It is costing €40 to €45 per tonne delivered into the yard. We are chopping it with a tractor-powered beet chopper and then load it into the diet feeder to mix with the other ingredients. The finishing cattle are getting 12kg of fodder beet, 7kg of concentrates (which is 50% rolled barley, 25% distillers and 25% soya hulls), 8kg of pit silage (68 DMD and 11.7% crude protein), approximately 1.5kg to 2kg of straw and supplemented with hi-phosphate minerals.

☛ The heavier store cattle are fed 15kg of baled silage (69 DMD and 12.1% crude protein), 2kg of concentrates, 6kg of fodder beet and 2kg to 3kg of straw and hi-phosphate minerals. The lighter store cattle that will be going back to grass are being fed baled silage ad-lib supplemented with 2kg of concentrates and vitamins and minerals daily.

**NIAL PATTERSON****CO LEITRIM**

The weanling heifers are being fed 20kg of silage and 3kg of concentrates. The ration comprises barley, distillers, maize meal and soya hulls with a crude protein of 16%. The weanling bulls are fed 4kg of the same ration and ad-lib silage. Cows were housed with a BCS of between 3.0 and 3.5. I am pleased with their condition this winter in comparison to previous years. They are being fed first-cut silage and straw ad-lib. The silage analysis came back with 65 DMD and a protein level of 13.4%.

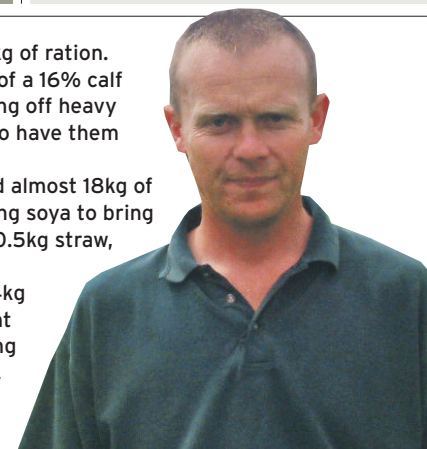
The cows have started calving within the past three weeks. Calving is going well so far and the calves look promising. A pre-calving mineral mix was fed to the cows from six weeks prior to calving. After calving, the cows will get 2kg of the same ration as the weanlings and ad-lib first cut silage until they are settled back in calf. I plan on housing the ewes by the end of January, weather permitting.

**DONIE AHERN****CO LIMERICK**

I have my autumn cows on ad-lib 72 DMD silage, plus 2kg of ration. Their calves have access to grass and are getting 1.5kg of a 16% calf nut. Spring-calving cows are dried off and are still grazing off heavy covers of grass. I am strip grazing them daily and plan to have them out until early January.

Spring weanlings are indoors and on 2kg of ration and almost 18kg of silage. I plan to increase the protein in the meal by adding soya to bring it to 16% soon. My finishing bulls are on 12kg of ration, 0.5kg straw, 8kg silage and 5kg water.

Finishing heifers are on 8kg of ration, 0.25kg straw, 4kg water and 12kg silage. All silage being fed at the moment is 72 DMD and from the pit. I had previously been feeding 76 DMD baled silage. The ration consists of 20% wheat, 20% barley, 25% maize, 20% citrus, 15% distillers and minerals.

**CHARLIE CRAWFORD****CO DONEGAL**

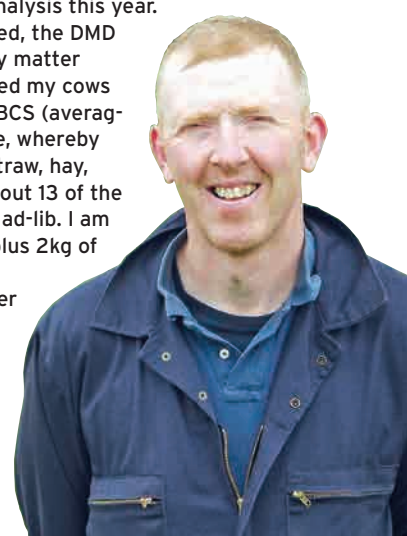
The cows have just started calving. I am extremely happy with how the calving season has gone so far. Prior to calving, the cows are fed ad-lib silage 71DMD and 100g pre-calving minerals. The cows are housed according to BCS. The calved cows are being fed ad-lib silage and 2kg of concentrates until they are settled back in calf. The replacement heifers and weanling heifers are on ad-lib silage, 0.5kg soya bean meal and 2kg of rolled barley. My aim is to get the heifers in store condition going to grass.

Soya helps to develop frame to the heifers without flesh. I weigh the heifers over the winter to monitor their progress. Last year, the flock of ewes was housed after Christmas for the first time. Traditionally, ewes would have grazed the farm until early March. I rested the entire farm and had early grass available for sheep and yearling cattle in the spring. I plan on doing the same in 2014.

**PATRICK DROHAN****CO WATERFORD**

I make all silage as bales and I am happy with my silage analysis this year. My two silage samples indicate that from the bales sampled, the DMD is ranging from 72 to 78, protein from 13% to 14% and dry matter (DM) from 26.9 to 29.7. I body condition scored and penned my cows accordingly. The majority of my suckler cows are in good BCS (averaging 3.0 to 3.25) and are consequently fed restricted silage, whereby I am feeding a bale of silage per day supplemented with straw, hay, vitamins and minerals to 27 cows. However, I have picked out 13 of the thinnest and youngest cows and they are being fed silage ad-lib. I am feeding my newly purchased calved heifers silage ad-lib, plus 2kg of concentrates.

My weanlings are now housed full time since 11 December and are being fed 78 DMD silage ad-lib and are supplemented daily with 2kg of 16% crude protein beef nut. I have the seven smallest weanlings grouped in a separate pen and they are supplemented with 3kg of concentrates. The 16% protein beef nut is costing €279/tonne when collected by myself. I will gradually take them off the concentrates about four to six weeks before turnout to grass.

**TOM HALPIN****CO MEATH**

Silage is tight on the farm as we lost the rented land earlier in the year, so I am keeping a close eye on fodder stocks and trying to stretch out the silage. As my spring calving cows were in good BCS (3.0) at housing, I have decided to restrict them by feeding approximately 30kg of silage along with 1.5kg of oaten straw. My 10 maiden heifers are fed 30kg to 40kg of silage and oaten straw. As the summer calving cows are still lactating, they are being fed approximately 40kg of silage supplemented with 1kg of concentrates. Their calves have access to a straw-bedded creep area and are offered hay, water and 0.5kg of concentrates. I decided to keep my spring weanling heifers this year with the view of selling them off grass next summer. They are being fed silage ad-lib and 2kg of concentrates. I am feeding all stock the same 15% crude protein ration and I am buying it in bulk bags. It is costing €270/tonne delivered and comprises rolled barley, wheat gluten, citrus pulp, soya hulls, soya bean meal, wheat distillers and flaked maize.

