

BETTER farm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

Forecast rain has reignited reseeding plans



DARREN CARTY
LIVESTOCK SPECIALIST
dcarty@farmersjournal.ie

Low volumes of rainfall since the start of the week and further rainfall forecast as the week progresses have been widely welcomed by farms operating on light or free-draining soils.

Many farmers had nitrogen applied in advance of rainfall and are quickly seeing the benefits, with fields greening up overnight. This is relieving pressure on farmers who have witnessed a rapid decline in growth rates and very poor recovery in harvested swards.

While growth is improving, it is important that steps taken to extend grass supplies are not set aside too quick.

Going into low covers too quickly will lead to grass supplies being quickly depleted and potential grass

shortages in the coming weeks.

Practices such as creep grazing of calves are maximising performance, while conserving grass supplies.

This approach will be continued in the coming months to prioritise the best grass available to calves.

It will also allow tighter grazing of swards with cows without affecting calf performance.

Aftermath swards coming back into the rotation are also allowing reseeding plans to be put back on the agenda.

In general, the programme

“Going into low covers too quickly will lead to grass supplies being quickly depleted and potential grass shortages in the coming weeks

farms have targeted reseeding 10% to 15% of their grassland area to increase grass productivity and allow higher stocking rates to be sustained.

Before undertaking any reseed, it is also important to assess fodder reserves, if not already completed.

The majority of farmers around the country report a larger volume of bales or a greater pit of silage.

One word of caution is that grass harvested at the start of the season may have a lower dry matter content.

This needs to be taken into account in fodder budgets with overestimation of fodder supplies running the risk of being short of feed next spring.

Farms that have surplus

fodder already saved are using this to allow more reseed or land improvement projects to be undertaken.

In autumn-calving herds, the focus is on feeding to maintenance and taking steps to ensure cows are in fit condition before calving.

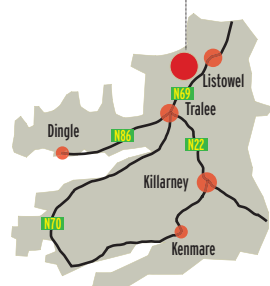
Cows are mainly being used to clean out paddocks with a high percentage of stem at the base of the sward.

Pre-calving minerals are also being introduced with most farms preferring lick buckets, due to ease of feeding.

NATIONAL OPEN DAY

Mike Dillane, Lixnaw, Co Kerry

Lixnaw,
Co Kerry



KIERAN MAILEY
LIVESTOCK SPECIALIST
kmailey@farmersjournal.ie

Mike joined the programme under phase two in 2012 and has made outstanding progress in two years. He has worked closely with programme adviser Alan Dillon and his local adviser Oliver McGrath to improve the output from his suckler herd and 59ha grassland farm.

His suckler herd has increased from 70 to 90 cows during the period on the same land block. The herd is predominantly autumn-calving but the drawn-out calving spread meant cows were running into early spring.

Tightening the calving period has been one area that has been addressed, with Mike moving to get all cows calved in a 12-week period from September to December

within the next few years. Although autumn calving carries higher costs from winter feeding of cows and provision of creep areas, having all cows calved in 12 weeks rather than six months will ease management and provide a considerable cost saving.

The herd is 100% bred to AI, which suits the autumn-calving system as cows are indoors for breeding. The choice of sires and quality of calves produced, most of which are export-quality, more than compensates for the additional feed costs in winter.

Cows are good, functional R-grade animals consisting of Limousin, Blonde, Simmental and Blue crossbred cows.

Calving interval is 381 days at present, although this has increased from the previous year due to cows being purchased and spring calvers

ON THE DAY

- ➔ Two walks start at 2pm and 6pm sharp.
- ➔ Speakers from Teagasc and Irish Farmers Journal.
- ➔ Parking facilities are provided on-farm.

Topics include:

- ➔ Overview of farming system and profitability.
- ➔ Drainage and land reclamation practices.
- ➔ Grassland management and soil fertility.
- ➔ Marketing stock and animal performance.
- ➔ Cow type and breeding performance using AI.

being culled.

Mike achieved 0% mortality at birth over the past two years, with only 1.2% mortality at 28 days. Cows possess plenty of milk, as highlighted by weight for age in prog-



eny. Through AI, Mike selects mainly Blue and Charolais sires that will breed export-eligible calves and uses Limousin and Simmental sires to breed heifers.

Selling weanlings

As with many suckler herds in Kerry, the traditional system was to sell weanlings. The best weanlings would be sold through local marts. Calves would be purchased for feedlots or live export, as calf quality is exceptional. Autumn bull weanlings currently weigh 418kg and

have gained 1.4kg/day of daily liveweight gain since turnout from grass. Heifers weigh 370kg and have gained 1.23kg/day in the same period.

Early spring bulls weigh 286kg and have gained 1.36kg/day since turnout, while early spring heifers weigh 280kg and have gained 1.23kg/day since turnout.

This year, there has been greater activity from live exporters looking to source cattle directly off farm.

After working through a few potential sale budgets,

Mike has decided to sell his export-quality weanlings live at €2.80 to €3.00/kg.

Considering current beef prices, neither the local mart trade or taking these cattle through to finish can compete with this price. Stock which do not make the export grade will be taken through to finish as under 16-month bulls out of the shed or 20-month-old heifers off grass.

Finishing

Weanling systems in the programme have the lowest



A TEAGASC/IRISH FARMERS JOURNAL INITIATIVE

In association with



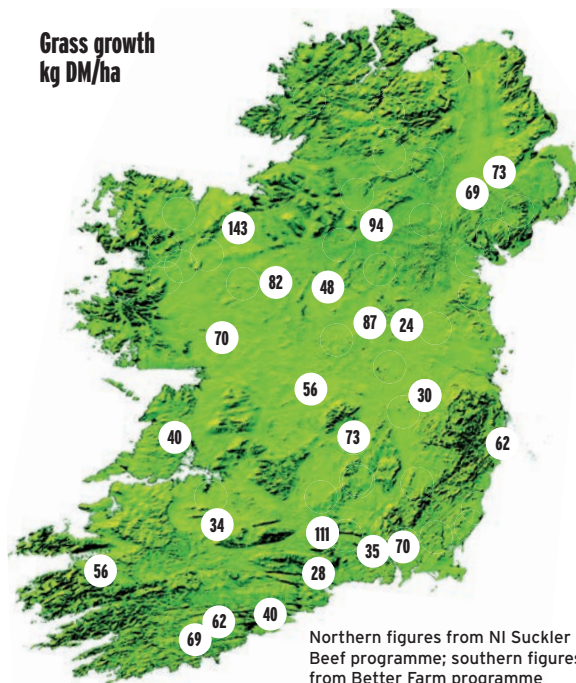
WEEK IN REVIEW

- ➔ Some programme farms have introduced meal to steers and heifers targeted for killing off grass in the next four to six weeks.
- ➔ Faecal egg counts are being used to identify the need for worm dosing.
- ➔ Fertilizer containing sulphur is being applied on light or heavy soils.
- ➔ Grass growth is excellent on heavy farms. Surplus paddocks are being taken out of the rotation and will be targeted at cows post-calving or finishing animals.

Dates for the diary

➔ **Thursday 24 July** - National BETTER farm programme open day hosted by Mike Dillane, Lixnaw, Co Kerry. Farm walks start at 2pm and 6pm.

TOP TIP

Grass growth
kg DM/ha

FARMER FOCUS

Mark Maxwell
Co Westmeath

I currently have 80% of my silage crop baled up. I aim to make around 1,500 bales annually and should achieve this target soon, once second-cut is completed.

I am finding 2014 a great year for grass growth and, despite my stocking rate having risen by 20%, I have no problem keeping grass in front of stock.

I am topping most paddocks at the moment on the outfarm to try to maintain quality. I haven't spread fertilizer in a few weeks but I am now targeting a bag to the acre of CAN after grazing to freshen up swards.

Some paddocks are also being skipped and baled. This top-quality silage will be fed to finishing stock.

I have the last of my bulls being finished at the moment. They have performed very well on 10kg per day of a

high cereal mix, consisting of barley, maize and hulls, and I find them a good source of cashflow during an otherwise quiet time in the drystock calendar sales-wise.

They are gaining 1.8kg per day at the moment and I aim to have them killed in a month once fat score is adequate.

I am contemplating buying in more bulls for finishing early next year but market price will dictate this decision.

Autumn cows will start to calve soon. I have had these dry cows grazing a rough area of land to keep them fit and in good condition for calving.

I find having cows well exercised leads to less calving difficulties. I will pick the

most forward of my heifers for finishing soon and start feeding them meal at grass.

I am looking at housing them for the final

finishing period and feeding high levels of ration, as I find it slower to build fat cover at grass than inside.

Ger Dineen
Co Cork

I have most of my silage made at this stage. My first-cut came in earlier than usual this year and quality should be much improved.

Rain is needed at the moment down here as some ground is starting to suffer from drought, but I am still okay for grass.

All calves are grazing ahead of the cows and I am allowing cows to graze as tight as possible behind them, down to 3.5cm.

I am spreading about 20 units of 24:2.5:5 plus sulphur after each grazing. I plan to take my breeding heifers to the outfarm soon to after-grass and possibly take out a paddock or two of strong grass before the forecast rain arrives to drive regrowth.

My stock are thriving well also at the moment.

My last weighing showed my bulls at 224kg and

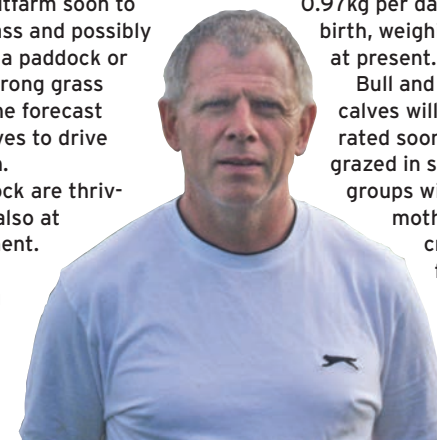
heifers at 226kg, although my heifers are on average older than my bulls.

Average daily gain is 1.32kg/day for the bulls and 1.28kg/day for the heifers. There is a large difference between the best and the worst stock, with the best bulls averaging 1.54kg per day versus the heifers averaging 1.02kg per day.

Over 300 days, this works out at 190kg, which at a liveweight value of €2.30/kg, equates to €359 between the two animals. It's something that all farmers should pay more attention to when selecting sires and deciding which cows to cull.

My breeding heifers are thriving well and have gained 0.97kg per day since birth, weighing 538kg at present.

Bull and heifer calves will be separated soon also and grazed in separate groups with their mothers. No creep is fed to any calves here until they are weaned.



Programme adviser Alan Dillon and Mike Dillane. The three-year farm plan has targeted increased output through increasing suckler cow numbers and the farm's stocking rate.

gross margin per hectare at €433/ha on last year's profit monitor results. Bull finishing systems averaged €795/ha.

Last autumn, Mike planned to sell his cattle live in the marts but did not receive an adequate price to reflect the weight and type of animal being sold. The cattle were brought home.

After doing out a finishing budget with Alan Dillon, Mike decided to finish his bulls and heifers out of the shed.

This was his first time fin-

ishing animals on the farm and because of the quality of cattle, they performed exceptionally well once pushed on a high concentrate diet.

Bulls were finished on 10kg/meal during the final stage of finishing. High quality 72 DMD silage was also offered in the diet.

Bulls were gaining 1.7kg/day on average during the finishing period. Typical feed costs were €2.60/head for meal (€260/t) and 5kg of silage cost a further 12c/head. Cost per kilogramme of live-weight gain was €1.60/day.

At 60% kill-out, the bulls would have been gaining 1kg/day of actual carcass weight, which meant they were more than covering their feed and housing costs this winter.

The bulls averaged 386kg deadweight and reached U grade. As they were paid on the grid, they qualified for the QA bonus, bringing the bulls into an average of €1660.

Heifers were also carried over winter but put back to grass with the intention of finishing off grass this summer.

Similar to the bulls, the heifers were only worth €650 last autumn in the live ring. Wintering on silage and 2kg/day of meal had a daily feed cost of €1.06/day.

Finishing the 600kg heifers off grass should result in a carcass weight close to 330kg. At current prices, these animals will be selling in excess of €1,300/head.

Profit monitor

Carrying the cattle for longer on the farm has allowed Mike to add more weight to cattle from a grass-based system.



This land block, pictured here before reclamation, produced one cut of silage in 2012 and no grazing as it was waterlogged for much of the year.

This has increased the value of cattle and is reflected in last year's profit monitor. In 2013, output was €1,265 per hectare. Variable costs were €875 and down almost 50% on 2012.

Gross margin in 2013 was €390 per hectare, a rise of €400 on the previous year. These figures do not include the increased sale value of the young bulls finished this spring, but do include a lot of the feeding costs associated with them.

Drainage

Mike's farm is a mix of land type, with 28 acres of a 50-acre outfarm being extremely heavy in nature. It is a heavy gley soil with a peaty topsoil that has poor drainage qualities.

This land block produced one cut of silage in 2012 and no grazing as it was waterlogged for much of the year.

In March 2013, a major drainage programme was started. The land was drained and reseeded by June with silage harvested in August. Weanlings grazed the land until December.

In 2014, 50% of it has produced two cuts of silage

and a grazing, while the rest has been grazed twice and produced a 13t crop of top-quality silage in May.

The project cost €64,850 for the complete works and is being costed over 15 years. While it is a massive investment, Mike could not carry his current suckler herd without this land.

Trying to rent 28 acres in the locality was impossible and at €200/acre in land rent, the annual conacre bill would be €5,040. Costed over 15 years, the annual repayment for the drainage work is €4,323 or €154/acre, which is considerably cheaper than renting land.

Also, factoring in that his own ground is now more productive and grazing 30 cows and calves makes the drainage job even more justifiable. There is no incentive to improve rented land unless it is secured on a long-term lease.

The success of the drainage worked was summed up by Mike this spring.

"In 30 years of farming, I have never had all of my stock out at grass by the end of April. This is the first year I have managed to achieve this."