

BETTER farm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

Options for winter feeding

This is the second instalment of a three-week series on the management and winter feeding practices across the farms in the BETTER farm programme



Michael Dillane
Kerry

Bulls are being built up to ad-lib ration currently, with the aim of having them finished under 16 months in February. They are currently being fed 8kg of concentrates per day, along with 70 DMD silage.

This year, I have expanded to kill 34 bulls out of the shed, an increase of 19 on last year. I will aim to kill all the bulls next year.

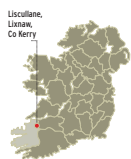
Heifers have been divided into three groups – store heifers, breeding heifers and finishing heifers.

Finishing heifers will be fed up to 6kg of ration per day until April, along with 70 DMD silage with the target of having a 310kg carcass. The finishing ration is 12% protein and 0.95UFL. It is a high cereal ration consisting of maize, barley, soya hulls and soyabean meal as the main ingredients.

Store heifers will be fed 1.5kg/day of ration, along with 70 DMD silage, while breeding heifers will be fed 1kg of ration, along with silage until they are served near Christmas.

Dry cows will be fed 66 DMD silage, while cows with calves at foot will be fed 70 DMD silage, plus a 15% protein ration of roughly 0.93UFL.

Heifers will be fed this ration for a period also, with finishers moving to the bull ration for the final finishing period to increase fat cover.



Pat O'Reilly
Clare

I have finishing cattle on a high cereal diet. The ration comes in at 1 UFL and 13% protein, with the main ingredients being barley and maize which total over 70% of the ration. They are being fed 6kg per day at the moment, along with 73 DMD silage and are thriving well.

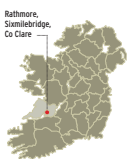
Weanlings are being fed an 18% protein ration at a rate of 2kg/head per day. I prefer to feed a higher protein ration to help grow a frame on weanlings over the winter. I will introduce straw in the diet to the weanlings now as the silage is very leafy and they are bit loose as a result.

The last of my bulls are being finished at the moment and will be built up to 9kg to 10kg of the finishing ration.

I also have about 50 other cattle finishing, consisting of steers and heifers, and I aim to kill these around Christmas time.

I will aim to replace these stock with forward stores for finishing late next spring or early summer. This will all depend on store price though.

I may look at zero grazing some of these stock to finish them indoors next year, depending on weather. I find the zero grazing useful, as it allows me to introduce top-quality grass into the diet early in the grazing season which cuts out the cost of silage.



Billy Glasheen
Tipperary

I have approximately 80 steers finishing at the moment. They are eating 72 DMD first-cut silage and 5kg to 6kg of a finishing nut. It is 0.95 UFL and 13% protein.

Last year, steers gained 1.2kg per day over the main finishing period on this diet and it will be interesting to see if I can achieve that again this year.

Stores are eating silage only. I have topped up the silage with 0.4kg of soyabean meal to increase protein in the diet.

Second-cut silage was disappointing this year at 66 DMD. I normally achieve 70 DMD for second-cut silage, but perhaps delayed the cutting date too long this year.

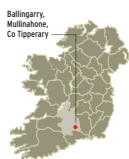
I find cattle can become a little loose on the high-quality silage with a lot of leaf in it, so I add a small amount of straw and find this dries cattle up well and stops them getting dirty.

My main aim for stores is to achieve 0.55kg to 0.6kg per day and turn back out to grass early in spring.

I have found that this system works well to get cheap weight gain on stock, but is very weather dependent. A wet start to the year won't suit me in this regard.

Stock have performed well this year and are achieving their target carcass weight of around 315kg.

The saving factor in combatting the low beef prices has been the amount of grass I have grown on the farm and the amount of weight gain achieved by utilising this grass.



David Walsh
Tipperary

Weanlings are being fed 75 DMD silage currently, plus 1.5kg of a 16% protein ration which is 0.93 UFL. The quality of my silage is slightly mixed, as it consists of baled silage cut at different times of the summer from paddocks, main cut, etc.

If the weanlings move on to lower-quality silage, I will increase meal feeding to 2kg to 2.5kg per head per day.

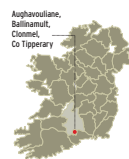
My main aim is to turn them back out to grass as early as possible. I aim to turn out my Limousin/Friesian cross heifers for breeding first, yet they are capable of significant weight gain from February to the start of the breeding season.

My dry cows are fed silage only and if quality is high, it is on a restricted basis of around 30kg to 35kg per day.

My cows were weaned in September and have regained a significant amount of condition by the time they were housed, so I can afford to restrict silage to them.

Minerals are supplied six weeks before calving. The last of my finishing cattle went in the middle of December. They were housed in early November and fed good-quality baled silage plus 6kg of a 12% protein, 0.95 UFV finishing ration.

I have averaged a 330kg carcass for my spring 2013-born finishing stock this year with most finished from grass. I hope to increase this carcass weight next year. My spring 2014-born weanlings are much better quality than previous years. I put this down to the introduction of two five-star Limousin bulls to the herd sired by Sympha. Weighings have showed they are 30kg heavier than last year's weanlings at the same age, but some of this can be attributed to good weight gain at grass.



Donie Ahern
Limerick

My feeding regime consists of four different diets. I have a finishing diet, which consists of 12kg of a 0.95 UFL, 12% protein ration, 3kg of water, 0.6kg of straw and 7kg of top-quality baled silage from paddocks.

This is being fed to the last of my finishing bulls and heifers. I managed to finish stock earlier than usual this year due to better thrive at grass, so my meal bill per head should reduce.

The weanlings are just after being housed and are on 20kg of 71 DMD silage, plus 2kg of a 15% protein ration.

Dry cows are being fed 32kg of 66 DMD silage, plus 0.1kg minerals, while autumn calvers are fed 25kg of 72 DMD silage plus 0.1kg minerals.

My aim is to turn stock out as early as possible in spring, as I have had great results with this over the last two years. Bulls gained up to 1.6kg per day at grass only until July, which is a great saving on the expensive final finishing stage indoors.

I had good results from my silage this year, with 71 DMD recorded for the first-cut and 70 DMD for the second-cut. I have high dry matter bales left over from last year that tested at 76 DMD. These bales are used for finishing stock.

Dry cows are fed 66 DMD baled silage only at a rate of 32kg per day plus minerals, while autumn calvers are fed 25kg of 71 DMD silage plus minerals.



The BETTER farm management team would like to thank all of the participants and their families for their hard work in 2014 and would like to wish them a happy, peaceful and prosperous new year.



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Patrick Grennan
Wexford

My cows are divided into three batches for winter housing and feeding. This is based on the body condition score and age of the cows.



The majority of the cows have been housed since early November. The cows with the best body condition score (3.25 to 3.50) are being fed my worst baled silage ad-lib, which is stemmy and around 60 DMD.

The thinner, mature cows with body condition score ranging from 2.5 to 3.0 are offered slightly better-quality baled silage ad-lib.

My replacement heifers and second calvers are kept together and are fed better-quality silage, which is around 68 DMD ad-lib.

I am keeping a close eye on the condition of the first calvers, as I don't want them getting over-fat.

All cow groups are being supplemented with a pre-calving mineral and vitamins.

Cows are due to start calving in early February and my scan results indicate that they will be very compact. I vaccinate my cows against IBR and salmonella before calving each year. I will also vaccinate them against rotavirus and coronavirus, as I had a scour issue last spring. Hopefully, it will help.

My heifer weanlings were housed in mid-December and are on good-quality silage (72 DMD) supplemented with 1.5kg of concentrates.

My bull weanlings are also on good-quality silage and 3kg of concentrate.

My ration is made up of 80% homegrown, urea-treated, rolled barley, 10% soya bean meal and 10% rape cake. This ration is 0.99 UFL and 16% crude protein and will grow the animals. Weanlings are also supplemented with a mineral and vitamin mix.



Trevor Minion
Wicklow

Cows and weanlings were housed in early November. I gradually weaned the calves after a week indoors by restricting them access to suckle the cows.



The cows are in very good condition and are ranging from 3.0 to 3.5 body condition score. They are being fed second-cut and late-cut baled silage that ranges from 62 to 66 DMD.

I am feeding 33 cows (including my in-calf heifers) two bales every two days and only one bale between them on the third day. I was feeding my cows and in-calf heifers approximately 100g/day of a general-purpose mineral/vitamin mix after housing, but will put them on a pre-calver mix six to eight weeks before calving.

The weanlings are being fed first-cut 72 DMD pit silage ad-lib and 2.5kg of concentrate. My ration consists of 85% homegrown, rolled barley and 15% soyabean meal and is 15.5% protein.

My finishing steers and heifers are on first-cut pit silage and 5kg of concentrate, which is made up of 90% rolled barley and 10% soyabean meal. This simple finishing ration is 13.6% protein and 0.99 UFL.

Both the weanlings and finishers are also supplemented with 100g of a general-purpose mineral and vitamin mix.

I orally drenched my weanlings and finishing cattle about four weeks after housing for worms and adult liver fluke with an albendazole-based product.

I shaved their backs and clipped their tails before applying a pour-on for lice using a cypermethrin technical-based product.



Heinz Eggert
Kildare

My cows are housed since early November and they are in good condition overall after the good supply of grass in 2014. I treated them for liver fluke and lice shortly after housing and penned them according to body condition.



The largest group of cows (75) have body condition scores from 2.75 to 3.0 and are being fed 23kg of second-cut 65 DMD silage and 2.5kg of barley straw.

I will increase the silage to 26kg at Christmas until calving. If I feel they are losing too much condition, I will increase the silage.

The second group of cows (12) have a BCS of 2.5 to 2.75 and are being fed second-cut silage ad-lib and my six thin cows are fed second-cut silage ad-lib and 1.5kg of concentrate.

My replacement heifers are mostly BCS 3.0 to 3.25 and are fed 22kg of second-cut silage and 2kg of straw. I hope to calve them down at BCS 2.5 to 2.75.

My weanling heifers were housed in late November and bulls were housed in early December. They are being fed 16kg of first-cut 69 DMD silage and 2.5kg of a 15% protein course ration. I am also supplementing them with 50g per day of mineral and vitamins.

I will reduce the heifers to 2kg per day of concentrate in early January and keep the bulls on 2.5kg. My weanlings and replacement heifers were treated for liver fluke, lice and worms shortly after housing.



John O'Connor
Kildalton College

Silage analysis shows that our first-cut, which was harvested on 27 May using the wagon system, had a DM of 19.5%, an ME value of 11.2, a crude protein reading of 12.2% and a DMD of 73.



Overall, we were quite happy with these results, even though the pH was a little high at 4.2.

The second-cut was harvested on 22 July using the wagon system. It had a similar crude protein and energy levels as the first at 12.4% and 10.9 MJ of ME.

However, the DMD at 69 and the dry matter at 29.8% were to be expected after the very dry July we had this past year.

Suckler cows are housed and are being fed 30kg grass silage and 3kg straw, plus 100g per day of minerals.

A high proportion of them have a body condition score of 3.5. The January-calving cows have been vaccinated against E coli, rotavirus and coronavirus, while the mid-February-calving cows will be vaccinated in early January.

Finishing cattle are on 5kg meal and ad-lib silage. The meal is a 14% crude protein ration of mainly maize, barley, soyabean hulls, distillers, rapeseed meal and maize gluten meal.

The weanlings are on 2kg of this ration and ad-lib silage. Those bulls suitable for bull beef will be gradually increased from this level in mid-January to ad-lib ration and straw by mid-February with a view to being finished at less than 16 months in June and July.



Richard Jennings
Mayo

My cows started calving in mid-November and I have 39 cows calved so far. Once calved, they are in individual calving pens for two to three days, then put into group pen of seven cows.



When the calves are one week old, I group them and they have access to a lie-back. As I have a compact calving season, all the calves are of a similar age when grouped, which reduces the risk of stress and disease.

The cows' tails are clipped, which reduces the risk of the calves ingesting bacteria indoors.

Only five bull weanlings are left on-farm. At the moment, they are averaging 365kg. I plan on selling these bulls before Christmas.

Once the calves get stronger, I will let them outdoors to graze during the day to get cheap extra weight gain from grass.

Faecal samples were taken on the farm and these were used as part of the dosing programme.

I found it very beneficial to carry out the tests, as it allowed me to treat the animals as required. It can also allow you to check on how effective the dose is.

The cows were already given boluses prior to calving to cover for selenium, copper, cobalt and iodine. All cows will get their annual booster vaccinations well in advance of calving for BVD and Lepto.



Tom Halpin
Meath

I started weaning and housing my spring-calving cows over a two-week period starting on 20 October. My spring-calving cows are in good body condition score (3.0), so I am restricting them by feeding approximately 30kg of silage along with 1.5kg of oaten straw.



My maiden heifers are fed 30kg to 40kg of silage and oaten straw.

As the summer-calving cows are still lactating, they are being fed first-cut 69 DMD silage ad-lib, supplemented with 1.5kg of concentrates.

Their calves have access to a straw-bedded creep area and are offered hay, water and 1.5kg of a 16% protein ration. I will increase the calves to 2kg of ration from mid-January. The summer-born bull and heifer calves weighed 224kg and 213kg, respectively, after housing and have grown at 1.33kg/day and 1.19 kg/day, respectively, since birth. I hope to put approximately 100kg on these over the winter.

I housed my 2013 summer-born beef heifers in early November. They were on good grass and 2kg to 3kg of ration for four weeks before housing.

They are now on first-cut silage and built up to 6kg of 14% high-crude protein, high-energy finishing ration. I hope to have them slaughtered in early January at 290kg to 300kg carcass.

My spring 2014-born heifers are now on ad-lib 69 DMD first-cut silage and 2kg of a 16% crude protein ration. The heifers averaged 325kg at housing and grew at 1.19 kg/day since birth and 0.95 kg/day since late June. I hope to grow them at 0.5kg/day to 0.6kg/day over the winter.