

# BETTER farm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

## Management and feeding



**Joe Murray**  
Co Roscommon

After a good autumn, 30 cows that calved first were only housed in early December. This was a huge benefit, as having a heavy farm restricts early grazing. It reduced silage requirements and slurry storage greatly.

I had the Charolais stock bull running with these cows and would expect some of them to have gone back in-calf. I have 64 cows out of my 79 cows calved at the moment. I am pleased with the calving season so far.

The calves are also much stronger coming indoors after being out for the first few weeks. The calves have access to a lie-back and I intend to let them out to a paddock during the day. This reduces the risk of viruses and scour among the calves.

Some calves have got their second vaccination. I will be dosing the cows early based on faecal sample results. The weanling heifers and replacement heifers will also be faecal-sampled and dosed accordingly. Cows that calved last July were scanned last week and I am pleased they were all in-calf except one.

The last in the series on what the BETTER farm programme farmers are doing with regards to management and feeding this winter



**Ger Dineen**  
Co Cork

I have almost all my stock housed at this stage. I had a small amount of heavy covers left over that were too wet to graze in November and I intend to graze these now with weanling heifers if ground conditions allow.

I have all cows, heifers and bulls housed on baled silage at the moment.

My pit silage tested at 68DMD and this will be fed to dry cows. All cull cows and finishing heifers were fed 76DMD baled silage.

Cull cows are on 8kg of a finishing ration and heifers are on 4.5kg of the same ratio prior to slaughter. My dry cows are on silage only at the moment, along with dry cow minerals.

Bulls that I will finish under 16 months are currently eating 3kg to 4kg per day of a 14% 0.95 UFL ration, plus ad-lib 76DMD baled silage. From the end of January, I will begin working the bulls up to ad-lib ration, plus ad-lib straw for the final finishing period.

Over the last few years, I had fed my heifers 1kg to 2kg of ration as silage quality was only average at best. I found that my heifers were getting too big by the time they calved down.

My aim is for a 650kg to 700kg cow and currently a lot of my cows, due to Simmental breeding, are 750kg to 800kg.

My dosing regimen consists of treating all stock with a pour-on for worms and lice. I treated all stock with Zanil for rumen fluke again this year as faecal test results last year showed up fluke eggs and there have been incidences on nearby farms this year again.

I am awaiting test results from blood samples carried out by Teagasc as part of a trial to establish the presence of liver fluke eggs.



**James Kenneally**  
Co Cork

My dry cows are currently housed on 69DMD silage at a rate of 26kg per day, plus 4kg of straw. They will remain on this until near calving when hay will be introduced to the diet for the last few weeks.

After calving, if weather doesn't permit turning them out to grass, I will introduce 10kg of fodder beet per day.

My weanling steers have been housed since early November and are currently fed 16kg of silage, 10kg of fodder beet and 1kg of soyabean meal, giving close to a 16% protein diet of 0.93 UFL.

My finishing steers and heifers are fed 20kg of beet, 26kg of silage and 0.5kg of soyabean meal. I aim to increase this level of feeding now by introducing prop-corn-treated barley to the diet and finish all steers in March and April at around 420kg to 440kg carcass.

My system for heifers involves finishing them at 17 months out of the shed at around 300kg. I start them off in November on a growing diet, which is the same as other weanlings are fed, and I gradually increase it through spring, building it up to 7kg to 8kg of ration until I kill them in May or June.

This system has worked well for me over the last few years, as I have plenty of shed space, but am limited with grassland.

All stock are now dosed for liver fluke, worms and lice. Due to a TB outbreak on my farm, numbers are lower than expected this year.

I have 48 cows calving next spring, where I had expected to have 55, and my numbers of weanlings and finishing stock are slightly behind also as a result.

Hopefully, my gross margin won't be affected too much by this.



**Mark Maxwell**  
Co Westmeath

I have all stock housed now, with dry cows on moderate-quality silage until calving. They were housed late as I used them to clean up swards until late December. They are in good condition and I find them having freedom to walk and exercise near calving time helps reduce calving difficulties.

Weanlings are currently on a 16% protein diet of barley and soya, along with good-quality baled silage which tested at 70% to 74% DMD.

My main aim with weanlings is to grow a good frame on them over the winter and send them back to grass as early as February if ground conditions and grass supply allows.

Finishing stock are currently on 8kg of a barley/soya/maize mix, which is 12% protein and 0.95 UFL. As I have all baled silage, the quality varies, but most of my silage came in at between 70 and 74 DMD.

I had a number of groups of stock faecal-sampled on the farm in November and results showed no issues with liver fluke, rumen fluke or worms.

I had treated for all three during the grazing season and treatment has worked. I am back focusing on the spring-calving herd now, which will be starting calving shortly.



**James Madigan**  
Co Kilkenny

I housed my autumn-calving cows in two batches in early and mid-November.

They were approximately halfway through their nine-week breeding season when housed and I only noticed three cows repeating when housed. I will pregnancy scan the cows in early February.

The autumn cows are on 70DMD first-cut silage with 2kg of a high-energy 14% protein pelleted ration. Their calves are on hay, water and 1kg of ration.

Despite the calves being vaccinated against PI3, RSV, Pasturella and IBR, they developed a cough which I had to treat separately.

My spring cows are due to start calving in early January and they stayed out at grass on very dry rented land until mid-December. They are being fed good-quality silage ad-lib and pre-calver mineral and vitamins.

I housed and dosed my 2013 autumn-born yearlings and 2014 spring-born weanlings in early November. They are being fed first-cut baled silage that tested 70% DMD and 2kg of concentrate. I hope to grow them at 0.6kg/day over the winter.

I housed my 2013 spring-born heifers and steers for finishing in early October. They were worm-dosed with a pour-on prior to housing and my faecal sample results indicated that there was no worm, liver or rumen fluke burden present.

The steers weighed 609kg and the heifers 539kg on 27 September. They are being fed my first-cut baled silage, supplemented with 5kg of pelleted ration for the heifers and 6kg for the steers.



**Patrick Drohan**  
Co Waterford

I weaned my weanlings in early November and the male castrated calves were 352kg and grew at 1.2kg/day. The heifers were 320kg and gained 1.12 kg/day since birth.

The cows were housed at weaning, but the calves were allowed access from the shed to a paddock beside the yard for two weeks. When the weather started to get very wet in November, I housed the weanlings full-time.

I separated the nine lightest heifer weanlings and I am feeding them 3kg of a 16% crude protein nut with ad-lib 74DMD silage to try to push them on. I am watching that they are not getting over-fat.

The rest of the weanlings are getting 2kg of the ration and ad-lib 74DMD silage. I will cut them back to 1kg in January and take them off concentrates about three weeks before going back to grass. My aim is to grow them at 0.6kg/day to exploit compensatory growth at grass next summer.

The weanlings were dosed for worms before weaning at grass and again around three weeks after housing full-time with pour-on for lice.

My cows are in good body condition score, ranging from 2.75 to 3.5, with most cows around 3.

I am feeding one bale of 70 to 74DMD silage to my two groups of 21 and 35 cows each day. It works out at around 22kg to 35kg per head per day freshweight. I am feeding them straw over the weekends.

I want to calve my cows at body condition score 2.5 to 2.75. I will start calving in early January, so the early-calving cows are vaccinated against rota and corona virus. Cows are being fed a pre-calving mineral lick bucket.



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## Richard Williamson Co Meath



I started housing my cows on 25 October. The cows with male calves were housed and weaned on the one day as ground conditions started to get wet and I felt it would help stretch out the grass for my beef heifers.

I then housed and weaned my cows with heifer calves on 1 November. My cows are in excellent body condition score (averaging 3.25 to 3.5) after the good year of grass growth and are being fed my pit silage, which tested 20.7% dry matter and 67% DMD and was cut on 5 June.

My Angus cross continental weanlings are fed baled silage, which was cut as a second-cut in mid-July and tested 28.9% dry matter and 69% DMD.

The castrated steers are on 2.5kg of a 15.5% crude protein ration mix and I will drop them back to 2kg and 1kg in January and February.

The heifers are supplemented with 2kg of ration, which I will drop down to 1kg before turn-out. The ration consists of 33% rolled barley, 19% distillers, 19% maize gluten, 9% soya hulls, 7% beans, 6% oats, 5% molasses and 2% minerals and vitamins. This costs €225 delivered including vat and is 0.94 UFL.

I hope to grow my weanlings at 0.5kg to 0.6 kg/day over the winter so I can exploit compensatory growth at grass next summer.

My cull cows are on ad-lib pit silage and 3kg of rolled barley. I hope to slaughter them early this year.

My weanlings were treated for worms and lice after housing. I may take faecal samples to assess liver fluke activity.



## Marty Lenehan Co Sligo



All the spring-calving cows were housed in early November. Therefore, I was able to leave the autumn-calved cows out longer, making it easier pick them up coming in heat.

The replacement heifers were last to be housed at the end of November. The cows have their tails clipped and were treated for lice when they were housed. It reduces sweating and has been done for a number of years and is very beneficial.

By clipping the cow's tail, it reduces the possibility of dirty udders and the risk of bacteria being ingested by the calves.

All the calves have restricted access to the cows and suckle morning and evening. In the past, I have found that this has aided getting cows back in-calf.

The cows are not being supplemented and are fed silage only. The calves have access to a straw-bedded lie-back and outdoor grazing throughout the winter.

The calves are much healthier when they can go out to graze. Faecal samples taken on the farm will be used as part of the dosing programme. The spring-calving herd will start to calve from early January.



## James Strain Co Donegal



I have 12 of my autumn-calving cows calved at the moment. The heifer calves born first are doing very well and look very promising.

All the calves have access to a dry area to lie at the back of the cows. They will be going out early, which will help break the cow/calf bond and the cows will come in heat earlier.

The calves are much healthier and have increased weight gain when they have access to pasture.

Faecal samples have been taken from a selection of the stock and sent away for analysis. I will be using the results to decide which dosing programme I will use.

I find this is a great way of seeing how effective the worming programme has worked over the summer months also.

All cows will get their annual vaccinations prior to the start of the breeding season.

I changed the penning of the cows last winter. Instead of penning to calving date, I penned to body condition score of the cows and it has worked well.

I am feeding according to body condition score also. Those that are carrying too much condition are fed a restricted diet and thin cows and heifers are being supplemented.



## Donal Scully Co Limerick



As my main enterprise is summer-calving finishing bulls at under 16 months of age, I now have all my cows calved, the majority served and all my bulls killed.

The winter stock consists of in-calf cows and cows not yet scanned in-calf with calves suckling, spring-born Limousin/Friesian-bred heifers and finishing heifers.

Cows that are in-calf with calves at foot are being fed ad-lib 74DMD silage plus minerals, while those not yet scanned in-calf are fed 1.5kg of a 15% protein ration along with the silage ad-lib.

Finishing heifers are eating 74DMD silage ad-lib, along with 4kg of a 12%, 0.95 UFL finishing ration. These will be slaughtered later this month and in February.

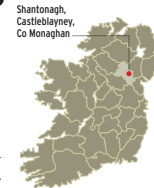
Calves have access to grass by day while weather allows and are fed 1kg of ration daily, along with access to silage at night. If weather turns bad, they will be kept inside and meal levels increased to 1.5kg per day. Spring-born weanlings are being fed 2kg of a 15% protein ration, along with 74DMD silage.

On the health side, I have vaccinated all calves with their second shot of Bovipast and they are treated for IBR also. All stock have been treated for lice and worms and I am awaiting blood samples taken as part of a fluke trial being carried out by Teagasc to see if a fluke dose is needed.

I used a pour-on dose for lice and worms. I shaved the backs of all stock going into the shed when doing this to hopefully increase its effectiveness. My herd is now classed as BVD-free, having completed the three years of testing all stock in the herd.



## David Mitchell Co Monaghan



2014 has been a good year in Monaghan. Following an almost disastrous 2013, it was a joy to farm, with grass growth holding up right into the autumn.

I held off grazing heavy covers and hope now weather-permitting to have my lighter spring-born heifer weanlings ready for turn-out in early February.

Cow numbers are increasing steadily with a few purchases made in 2014. It has been difficult with culling to raise numbers very quickly.

Based on grass growth, I can definitely carry more stock in the future. I will have to look at housing, as sheds are quite full, and increasing cow numbers will mean I will have to invest in extra housing.

Having a quick look at the figures for 2014, my sales and output are up, but my meal bill is still quite high, due to a delay in getting cattle killed last spring and also due to opting to finish my steers and heifers over a shorter time frame this winter.

I will look at this in 2015 and try once again to increase my weight gain from grass and try to have cattle coming into the shed heavier in autumn 2015. Silage stocks are way ahead of this time last year.

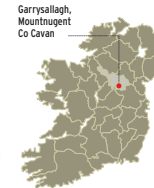
Finishing cattle at the moment are on ad-lib first-cut silage, which analysed 67DMD and 11% protein and 5kg of a finishing ration.

They were weighed on 11 December and were averaging 1kg liveweight gain per day.

These steers and heifers will be due to be killed in the next two months. Autumn calving finished well and spring cows are due to start calving on 1 February.



## Michael Smith Co Cavan



2014 will be remembered here in Cavan as a great grass growing year.

This was the first time I completed a full year's grass measurements and this greatly aided me in managing grass during the year. I was able to take out a lot of paddocks during the year.

I was probably able to take out paddocks every year, but measuring and budgeting this year gave me the confidence to take them out and there were no ill effects.

Walking the farm also alerted me to some poor, under-performing paddocks on the farm. These paddocks are next to be reseeded.

With store heifers coming in quite heavy off grass, I chose to finish a pen to see how I would get on. These are due to be killed this week and, depending on how they kill, I will then decide if I will increase or decrease my finishing enterprise.

I was very happy with the performance of my bull weanlings this year. Autumn weanlings averaged €1,066/head and spring bull calves averaged €900/head.

All weanling heifers have been kept to bring through to store stage.

We closed some paddocks in early November and these paddocks have some heavy covers, which will be suitable for grazing by my weanling heifers, hopefully in February.

Spring calving has started this week with three cows calved and no problems to report.

Cows came into the shed in very good condition and some cows which are over-fat are being fed restricted silage and straw.

Dry cows are being fed a dry cow mineral and weanlings are getting 2kg ration and ad-lib silage.