

DEALING WITH A DROUGHT

Take Action Now!

Drought is Affecting All Farms Now – Grass Supplies are Dramatically Falling

DAIRY

Grazing

- Graze 1/30 of the farm each day e.g. if you have 100 acres, graze 2.5 acres,
- If grass is in short supply milking cow should get priority, feed in-calf heifers and young stock on restricted forage plus ration,
- Avoid housing animals, where possible, heat stress is an issue right now. Keep a close eye on water drinkers. Dairy cows at the Greenfield site are drinking 100 litres of water per day for 20 litres of milk production,

Meals

- Increase meal feeding up to 5-6 kg, if there is still a deficit feed good quality silage,
- Meal type: Use a high energy ration with 16-18% crude protein. Avoid using high levels of straights e.g. soya hulls and if using high levels check the overall crude protein of the diet is 15-16%

Silage

- Fill the feed gap with silage and meals, for example: 6 kg DM grass available, 6 kg DM silage, 6 kg fresh of ration,
- 1 bale of silage will feed 30 cows for 1 day with 6 kg ration and limited grass,

Culls

- If cows are to be culled, consider once-a-day milking and full feed to allow earlier selling.

BEEF

Grazing

- Continue a 30 day rotation, graze one quarter of the farm each week, Supplement with silage / meals, where necessary,
- Avoid housing animals in warm weather, Heat stress may be an issue now. Keep an eye on water troughs,

Concentrates

- A high energy low protein (12-14% CP) will suffice for finishing cattle and suckler cows. Yearlings and calves will require high energy rations with 16% CP
- Feed in-calf heifers, weanlings & stores on restricted silage plus ration,

CALVES

- Consider weaning early calving cows (Jan / Feb / Early March),

- Wean autumn calving cows, if you have not already done so,
- Forward creep calves, rather than feeding high levels of ration to suckler cows.

FERTILISER

- Continue to apply fertiliser, as per recommendations,
- There will be little response to applied fertiliser due to lack of moisture but there will be negligible losses
- Make sure that fertiliser is spread, particularly before the next forecasted rain – and whether that is one day before or ten days beforehand will make no difference.

CHOICE OF FEED

The **choice of feed to fill the gap** will depend on:

- Current winter feed supply
- Access to grazing area designated to 2nd cut silage
- Costs of additional feed

Each farmer must do a budget to establish the extent of the winter deficit. The greater the deficit in silage stocks for next winter, the less scope there is to use silage/other forages to fill the gap.

- It is critical to have 75% of your silage requirements for next winter:
- If you have 75% of what is needed for next winter, then you can afford to feed some silage to stock now
- If you have less than 75% of what is needed next winter, then you need to look at reducing feed demand, buying forage, feeding restricted silage plus meals to young stock & dry cows.

UTILISING SILAGE

1. If grass areas closed for 2nd cut silage must be grazed, strip graze
2. If grass areas closed for 2nd cut are not available for grazing, harvest as normal but conserve as somebales for ease of feeding
3. DON'T OPEN SILAGE PITS TO FILL THE GAP. Use bales instead

How much silage will the current drought cost?

An 80 cow dairy herd feeding 1/3 of the diet as silage for the next 6 weeks will utilise 80-100 tonnes of silage. This has the potential to increase the silage deficit for next winter by 8-10%