

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Farmers have shown tremendous resilience in the face of difficult weather conditions in 2018. A major fodder scarcity was caused by difficult weather conditions restricting growth in spring and summer. Fodder supplies have largely been rebuilt on most farms through a combination of measures implemented in recent months. However, despite the recovery in grass growth during autumn, annual growth rates remain behind the long term average. Regional differences in annual deficit exist. It is essential that individual farms continue to monitor feed stocks through the winter.

### **Short Term**

A fodder survey completed at the end of October showed that 1/3 of farmers nationally are still short 15% of fodder. This is equivalent to a deficit of 3 weeks feeding, based on a 145 day winter.

What actions should you take now if you think you may be short?

1. Do not be complacent this winter. Assess your own situation and do not rely on local 'average' figures
2. Do a fodder budget now at housing and again at the beginning of January.
3. Be realistic about the length of the winter
4. If there is a deficit on the farm,
  - a. Budget forage and feed additional meals to fill the gap
  - b. Take the action early in the winter. Don't delay until January 2019 to take action
5. Put a plan in place to deal with the financial cost of 2018

### **Long Term**

1. A national census of stocks of winter fodder harvested should be conducted in July and November every year. All farmers need to do fodder budgets for their own farms at these dates.
2. Farmers should plan to carry a 2 month reserve of silage (0.7 t DM per livestock unit) in excess of that required for a normal winter. This should be carried as a rolling feed reserve. There will be cost involved but will greatly reduce the impact of future weather events.
3. Considerable scope exists on most farms to increase grass and silage production through improving soil fertility. Improving soil fertility should be encouraged and promoted.
4. Expanding farmers should match stocking rate to average grass growing capacity.
5. Contract farming arrangements helped farmers to deal with fodder shortage in 2018. Contracts between tillage farmers and livestock farmers for fodder production and between dairy and drystock farmers for contract heifer rearing should be further encouraged and promoted.
6. Decision support tools to accurately value available feed options on a dry matter, energy and protein basis, need to be upgraded and disseminated to farmers and industry professionals.
7. Farmers need to ensure they have facilities to store fodder and to allow restricted feeding of forage so that available silage can be spread over the winter period, when necessary.