

CASE STUDY

Wexford farmer plans to restore a buffer

This farmer's feed reserve was consumed. Now he's working to restore it based on a fodder plan

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David Kinsella is a suckler farmer on 42ha (104acres) just outside New Ross in Co Wexford. David was one of the lucky ones in 2017/18 and he did not run out of silage but came incredibly close.

"I usually have cows and calves out in February. However, this year that was impossible," says David. "Our entire feed buffer was used up and this now has to be rebuilt." He has put a fodder budget in place to prepare for next winter. It includes extra forage production to build his reserve.

David is changing his system slightly. Up until now, he finished his heifers off grass in October and half the males as bulls under 16 months and the rest as bullocks of grass in October. Next year, he will finish all the male cattle as bulls and keep an extra 10 suckler cows. For winter 2018/19, he will have:

- Fifty-five suckler cows calving from January to March. David makes excellent quality silage in the region of 72 DMD, so the cows are to be restricted back to two-thirds of their allowance, hence 0.9t per head per month instead of the usual 1.4t of silage at 65 to 68 DMD.
- Thirty heifers to be finished off grass in the autumn. These are on 0.7t of silage per month, as is recommended with 3kg of meal on housing up to December, and then reduced to 1.5kg to turn-out.
- Twenty in-calf heifers, calving from January to mid-March. These are calving at two years of age and still have some growing to do. They are fed good-quality silage up to Christmas and then restricted up to calving. After calving, they get 2kg of meal.
- Thirty-five bulls to be finished under 16 months. These start on 3kg of meal and ad-lib top-quality silage up to January. They are built up to 7kg of meal by mid-February and then up on to ad-lib and finished in May/



June. This is a 210-day finish and on average they are eating 0.5t of silage per month.

How is this to be achieved?

- **First cut:** David made 12ha or 30 acres first cut.
- **Yield:** it yielded at least 10t per acre giving him 300t.
- **Date of first cut:** the first cut was taken on 1 June to allow him to close up for the second cut. This is important as he does not want the second cut to be too late as he wants to start to build covers in August for the autumn.
- **Stocking rate:** to achieve this he has pushed his stocking rate on the grazing area to 3,000kg per ha.
- **Fertiliser:** he is applying 27 units of nitrogen after every grazing.
- **Soil fertility:** all of his soil indexes are good, his pH is at 6.3 on average and the phosphorous and potassium indexes are at 3 or close to it. This allows his swards to achieve excellent

growth.

- **Growth rates:** at 3,000kg of live-weight per hectare, David needs a growth rate of at least 60kg DM per day. David is measuring his grass covers and on PastureBase Ireland in late May, he recorded a growth rate of 102kg DM per day. David has already taken out 78 bales of surpluses and at this growth rate he will have more bales from surplus paddocks in the coming weeks.
- **Second cut:** 15 acres will be closed for 6.5 weeks or so for the second cut. The second cut is trickier as growth rates are falling and demand is on the increase.
- **Fertiliser:** he will apply 2,500 gallons of slurry plus 2.5 bags of Sulpha Can for second cut. This will be taken out in mid-July (after 6.5 weeks) in the form of bales.
- **Yield:** the yield on this should be at least 7t per acre giving him 105t.
- **Surpluses:** if David removes silage from a paddock he will apply 2,500

gallons of slurry or 1.5bags of 18-6-12 to replace the P and K being taken off in the bales, while keeping in line with his nitrates allowances. This will also help to push on growth and yields.

"I need another 84t off surpluses to meet my target for a four month winter but to build a buffer I need 177t," says David. "This is the equivalent of 105 to 220 bales. I am aiming for the five month winter and already have 78 bales from surpluses. Now we have a budget we know we have to keep pushing fertiliser until we reach our target. If we don't reach the requirement, we will know early enough and can buy in bales, buffer feed with meals or sell some stock as a last resort."

As David sees straw as a potential problem in the coming years, he is re-designing and extending his suckler shed to incorporate more cubicles, with a lie-back for the calves and another tank.

Table 1: David's fodder budget winter 2018/2019

Animal type	Number of stock to be kept	Number of months	Number of months	Pit silage needed per head per month (tonnes)	Total tonnes of silage needed four month winter	Total tonnes of silage needed for a five-month winter
Suckler cows	55	4	5	0.9	198	248
In calf heifers	20	4	5	1.1	88	110
Heifers	30	4	5	0.7	84	105
U16 month bulls	35	6.8	6.8	0.5	119	119
Total					489	582

For bulls under 16 months finished over 210 days, their requirement is averaged above. In-calf heifers are fed ad-lib silage until Christmas, then restricted. Average intake over the winter 1.1t/month. David restricts his cows to two-thirds of their requirement and feeds straw to buffer. Total bales needed (tonnes multiplied by 1.25).

Table 2: Requirement for five-month winter

First-cut silage	300t
Second-cut silage	105t
Surpluses off paddocks	177t (221 bales)
Total	582



Next year, David Kinsella will finish all the male cattle as bulls and keep an extra 10 suckler cows. For winter 2018/19, he will have 55 suckler cows calving from January to March

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