

BEEF

October 2021

Autumn 2021 – improve your soil pH

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September 2021 has been largely favourable in terms of weather, with a long dry spell at the start of the month resulting in ground conditions being much better than in the previous two years. This is an ideal opportunity to aim to improve soil pH.

Application rates of lime on drystock farms are low; the intention to spread lime is often in the farmer's mind, but a wet spell in the autumn can finish with this intention, resulting in the job being left on the long finger. Chemical fertiliser prices have increased substantially this year and the likelihood is that this may remain the case for 2022. Lime prices have not increased, with most merchants supplying lime at around €25/tonne spread. This represents excellent value for money. Improving soil pH will allow fertilisers to work much more efficiently in the years ahead, therefore saving farmers money.

Targets for lime spreading

Target to spread on fields that have been grazed

off if possible. Lime comes in 20t or 25t loads so find around 10-12 acres needing around 2t/acre.

Don't be concerned about a small amount of lime residue on the leaf for grazing animals. Once rain has fallen on the field, most of the lime will be washed into the ground. A common perception from farmers is that lime will soften the sod. This does happen in soils with a large amount (5-10cm) of organic matter but this shouldn't stop lime application. Apply no more than 2t/acre at a time to avoid issues with this on soils with high levels of organic matter.

Slurry or urea should not be spread on land that is limed. Where land is freshly limed and has not been fully washed into the ground, up to 50% of the nitrogen (N) in slurry and urea can be volatilised into the atmosphere.

The return on investment with liming is substantial. Liming an acidic soil gives an increase of 1t DM/ha grass production. This is worth €105/ha to a beef farm.

Badger watch

Philip Breslin and Rosanne Greene discuss how to spot signs of badger activity during the winter.

Badger setts are mostly found in hedgerows, ringforts and riverbanks. Large spoil heaps at the sett entrance are a tell-tale sign that it is a badger sett. They are capable of moving quite large stones. Badger setts have openings of 25cm wide whereas a rabbit burrow may have a wide opening but the chamber quickly narrows. The presence of hay-like bedding beside a sett entrance is a definite sign of a badger sett. Badgers root in pasture searching for food, and



often overturn cow pats. They also form small pits about 12cm in diameter called snuffle holes.

They create well-worn paths about 15-20cm wide. In wet areas around gates or drinking troughs you may see badger footprints, which consist of a broad kidney-shaped pad with four or sometimes five toes visible in a straight line. A latrine pit is where a badger digs a small hole, defecates into it and leaves it uncovered, and are generally found close to a sett. Badgers' territory can range 500m to 1km from the main sett. If you see signs of badger activity on your farm, let the wildlife officer in your regional veterinary office know. For further information, see the videos available on www.bovinetb.ie.

Climate Actions for October

Check out your Bord Bia farmer feedback report for your carbon footprint figure



Allow topped hedges grow to at least 1.5m above the bank and allow a thorn sapling in each hedge grow to a thorn tree



Check your soil maps from the nutrient management plan and apply K to low index soils



Apply lime to low pH grassland and crop soils



Start closing paddocks from the 10th October onwards (1-2 weeks earlier in wet areas)



Start taking soil samples for your farm. Don't delay until after Christmas



RESEARCH UPDATE

The Teagasc Grange Derrypatrick Herd

The Derrypatrick Herd is a suckler beef research herd based at Teagasc Grange. The current experiment is comparing the performance of the progeny of sires divergent in maternal traits. The herd is predominantly Limousin and Simmental crossbreeds, with replacement heifers purchased as weanlings the autumn prior to breeding. All heifers and cows are bred to AI, with heifers bred to Angus sires and cows bred to a combination of Charolais, Limousin and Simmental sires.

The 2021 calving season commenced on February 2 and finished on April 16 (10.5 weeks). Ninety-nine cows and heifers calved down in this period with 99 live calves, including three sets of twins and three mortalities. The mean calving date was March 2, seven days earlier than in 2020. Average calf birth weight was 44kg. The first 30 cows and



Limousin crossbred cow with her Limousin heifer calf by Elite Ice Cream (LM2206). The heifer calf has achieved an ADG since birth of 1.26kg/day.

calves were turned out to grass on March 1. On September 2, all calves were weighed. The heifer calves (n=44) weighed 255kg (gain of 1.17kg/day from birth), and bull calves (n=54) weighed 271kg (gain of 1.22kg/day from birth). Weaning will take place in mid-October. Bull calves were castrated on August 25, and received a pre-weaning booster shot for pneumonia on September 2. The calves are creep grazing ahead of the cows and have started receiving 1kg of meal/animal/day.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Check lighting and electrical switches

The clocks go back on Sunday, October 31, which brings shorter daylight time. In advance of this check your farmyard lighting. Bulbs may need replacing and fluorescent covers may need cleaning to maximise light output. To prevent trips and falls, make sure that all walkways are well lit and free of trip hazards. Also, safely test your electrical residual current devices (RCDs) on switchboards. An RCD is an electrical safety trip switch



Consult ESB Networks Booklet: 'Farm Well Farm Safely'

that trips rapidly if an electrical leakage occurs. RCDs are mechanical and need to be test tripped regularly to ensure they are working. This is done by ensuring that there are no electrical devices operating and physically tripping the switch. For safety, ensure in particular that all handheld electrical devices, such as power washers and workshop electrical tools, are correctly wired and protected by a correctly operating RCD (30mA).



Preparing dairy-beef weanlings for winter housing

October is an important month on calf-to-beef farms. Practices need to be implemented to ensure that animals are free of stress and healthy prior to making the transition from an outdoor to a confined environment.

Less than ideal levels of performance are witnessed over the winter months on many calf-to-beef farms. Too often, animals fail to hit the desired daily weight gain target of 0.6kg/head/day during the housed period – an important target to ensure that the best use of compensatory growth is made at turnout.

In preparation for the winter housing period, Teagasc Green Acres participants Peter and Thomas O’Hanrahan in Co. Kilkenny are implementing a number of measures to ensure that the performance of their dairy-beef weanlings is not compromised. To ensure that the animals’ nutritional requirements are met, silage analysis will be undertaken. From this, concentrate feeding decisions – both quantity and protein content – will be made, and a ration with a UFL value of >0.94 and crude protein content of 14-16% will be purchased.

The supplementation of weanlings with 1kg/head/day of concentrate from mid-September will not only ensure that animals will continue to perform on



Supplementation with concentrate from mid-September will help performance.

autumn grass, but it will also help to reduce the impact of a diet change when they are moved to a silage and concentrate diet over the winter months.

In terms of health, the dairy-beef weanlings will also receive a dose approximately three weeks before housing to tackle lungworm. Although the parasite is killed after dosing, the interval between dosing and housing is necessary to give the lungs adequate time to recover and heal while in fresh air before moving indoors.

The O’Hanrahan’s are also implementing a vaccination programme for *Mannheimia haemolytica* (*Pasteurella*), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and PI3, as well as infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), and booster vaccines will be administered before animals are housed in an effort to prevent a disease outbreak occurring.

