

BEEF

March 2024

Getting to grass

EDITED BY
CATHERINE EGAN,
BEEF SPECIALIST



Aim to get cattle out to grass as much as possible in spring.

Teagasc research shows that every day at grass in spring is worth €2 per livestock unit. The goal of spring grazing is to get cattle to grass as many days as possible and set the farm up for summer. Spring is a time that has huge potential to increase profit if farms and farmers are set up to take advantage of it.



EVERY DAY

AT GRASS
IN SPRING
IS WORTH

€2

per livestock unit.

Making the most of grass

Here are steps to get the most out of spring:

1. Split the farm into three. Graze one-third by early March, two-thirds by St Patrick's Day, and the rest by April 10-15 (heavy farms 10-14 days later). Work out the target area to graze each week.
2. The first paddocks grazed should be the fastest growing, have 7-8cm covers, and be drier with good access. Graze silage ground in the second third (mid to late March), and wetter paddocks last.
3. Pick lighter animals to go out first. They

will have the best chance of grazing paddocks without damaging them. Work out if they will graze the target area each week. You may need to let out more stock.

4. Use strip-wires to move cattle daily and back fence. This avoids doing damage.
5. If ground conditions are poor, bring stock back in, but try to get them out again as soon you can. This is challenging but you will earn more for your effort. Don't limit yourself by land type or compare yourself to others. Focus on improving your own farm and performance year to year.

Calf rearing key tips

The primary aim of the rearing period on calf-to-beef farms is getting a calf from a pre ruminant to a ruminant as early as possible without decreasing performance. DairyBeef 500 participants are now calf rearing; the animal performance target now is a daily liveweight gain of 0.7kg from arrival to weaning. The focus is on ensuring the animal's environmental, nutritional and health needs are met.

Proper facilities

The shed in which animals are housed should be fit for purpose, provide a dry bed, facilitate cleanliness, and be adequately ventilated to ensure pathogens and bugs can escape. It should also allow for the ingress of fresh air without causing draughts. Only a suitable milk replacer, formulated using milk-derived proteins,



Sheds should have good ventilation without being cold.

should be offered. Ideally, this should be +20% protein, 16-18% fat/oil, and calves should be 85kg and consuming >1kg of concentrate for three consecutive days. The weaning process should also be completed gradually over a seven- to ten-day period, during which time calves should be monitored to ensure the transition from a milk-based diet to a solid feed diet is a success.

Upcoming events

Suckler breeding webinars

The Teagasc Future Beef team will host a series of webinars in March, entitled 'A Farmer's Guide to Suckler Breeding'. Topics to be covered include achieving key breeding targets, farmers' experience of new technologies, and where will your herd be in five years? The webinars will take place on March 20, 25 and 27, and all start at 8.00pm. For further information and to register, scan the QR code.



Spring beef walks

The Teagasc Beef Specialist team, along with the local advisory teams, are hosting a series of spring beef grass walks across the country.

Topics to be discussed include: nutrient management planning; farmer experience on establishing and managing clover; spring grassland management; and, fertiliser for grazing and silage.

Further details available at: www.teagasc.ie/beefwalks.



Organise your workload

March brings an increase in workload on many farms. It is important to be as organised as possible. Keep equipment well maintained and stored safely so it can be easily found when needed. This will save time and make tasks easier.

Getting enough rest

Working long hours on field operations or getting up regularly at night to check on cows calving and ewes lambing can make it very challenging to get enough sleep. Sleep when you can. This might be any time of the day if you're not getting enough rest at night. Having adequate sleep is important as it improves alertness and helps prevent injuries and ill health. A good routine for meals will also improve alertness and help prevent snacking and a poor diet. Seek help and use contractors to maintain a sustainable workload.



Adequate sleep is very important.

HEALTH AND
SAFETY



Beef-Quest

RESEARCH UPDATE

PAUL SMITH, MARK McGEE, BERNADETTE EARLEY, EDWARD O'RIORDAN, PAUL CROSSON and DAVID KENNY of Teagasc Grange, and ALAN KELLY (UCD), outline the new Beef-Quest project.

Reducing mean finishing age of prime beef cattle from 26 to 22-23 months by 2030 is fundamental to achieving Ireland's 25% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture. Nationally, mean age at finishing is six to nine months later than on grass-based research and high-performing commercial farms. There is an urgent need to identify and quantify factors impeding Irish beef farms from achieving potential liveweight targets throughout the animal's lifetime.



Beef-Quest is on a mission to reduce finishing age.

Collaborative research

The Teagasc-led Beef-Quest project aims to investigate the effects of nutrition, health and on-farm environment factors in constraining animal growth performance and finishing age of beef cattle, and assess their impacts on GHG emissions. In collaboration with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and UCD, this project will use data available within the industry. A new large-scale on-farm study is planned to generate new data and expressions of interest for participant farms will be sought in the coming months.

Beef-Quest will identify, quantify and rank the primary on-farm technical and behavioural-related issues negatively impacting finishing age. Using this new information more targeted, high-impact and deliverable solutions can be proposed and disseminated to reduce finishing age, thus improving the sustainability of Irish beef.