

Managing Livestock Nutrition in Current Weather Conditions

Five Steps to Putting Feed on your Farm

Karen Dukelow, Cattle Specialist

Spread fertilizer

- If conditions allow, apply 1 bag urea/acre. If no fertilizer has been spread to date, go again in 2-3 weeks with another 30 units of N per acre. You could switch to a compound like 18-6-12 where ground conditions are very good. Where possible apply slurry to the ground only after it has been grazed.

Get cattle out

- If you can't manage paddock grazing, put a small number of livestock out on a large area. This will ease shed space and save on silage. Get calved cows out by day. To aid recovery on grazed paddocks, graze only 1/5 of land available per week. When growth does take off, speed up rotation length by grazing 1/3 of the grazing area per week.

Sell some cattle

- Consider selling some stock, e.g. empty cows, forward stores.

Buy in silage/hay where available

Stretch out remaining silage

- You can halve the number of grabs/bales being fed by feeding extra meal (Table 1). Meal feeding compares well with buying in extra silage, with the meal feeding costing 50 cent/day per cow (dry) and buying in silage costing €1.00/day. However, for this system to work, silage needs to be restricted. Don't forget to feed minerals. Ensure a good supply of fresh water. Build up feeding rates slowly. This may require setting up additional trough feeding space in yards. All animals should be monitored regularly for signs of ill-thrift on this system. Monitor cow condition regularly. Supplementation rates may need to be increased or decreased, accordingly.

| One bale (600kg) of silage a day will feed: | kg meals needed per day | Crude Protein % in Meals |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 25 Suckler cows (dry) | 50kg | 12-14 |
| 25 Suckler cows (calved) | 125kg | 14-15 |
| 25 Stores (500 kg) / in calf heifers | 75kg | 12-14 |
| 50 Weanlings (up to 400kg) | 150kg | 14-15 |

Teagasc advice for Sheep farmers

Michael Gottstein, Head of Sheep Knowledge Transfer

Concentrate feeding

Initial farm covers may be sufficient to provide adequate grass for ewes post lambing but they will start reducing rapidly. Supplementing ewes with between 0.5kg and 1kg of concentrate per head per day will help to reduce grass demand until growth rates improve. Where ewes with young lambs are being forced to graze lower than 3cm then concentrates supplementation should be increased to 1.5kg per head per day in particular during wet weather when ewe intakes will be further reduced. Ensure that concentrates have Calmag to protect ewes against grass tetany.

Fertilizer

Heavily stocked farms that applied fertilizer in late February are now due the second application. This should be applied once weather and ground conditions are suitable regardless of the response that has been achieved from the first application.

Animal Health

Be vigilant when herding ewes for signs of sore teats due to harsh weather and over suckling by lambs. Where possible affected ewes (and her lambs) should be rehoused and treated twice daily with an antibiotic spray until the sores are healed. If mastitis has already set in, her lamb(s) should be removed and artificially reared.

Fodder shortage: Key actions for dairy farmers

Joe Patton, Dairy Specialist

Grass and fertilizer

- Average farm cover must not be allowed to drop below 500kg per hectare in early April. Farms with large areas grazed and little, to no, grass need to reduce grass demand. Restrict daily area grazed and introduce supplementary feed.
- It may take until at least April 15th before there is enough grass to start the second grazing round. Plan to stretch the end of the first rotation to that date.
- Farms with a low percentage grazed and good grass covers must get area grazed now, especially where silage stocks are tight.
- The aim is to have 70 Units Nitrogen per acre out by early April. Ground conditions have picked up for most parts of the country so this should be possible.

Feed Stocks

- Assess available silage stocks and likely feed demand immediately. Early action on feed deficits makes the problem easier to solve.
- Aim to have at least 1.5 weeks silage reserve on hand by late April. If this is unlikely, it is best to take action now to stretch supplies. A 30% deficit in silage can be managed by feeding extra concentrate. Above this, forage should be purchased.

Milking cows

- A minimum of 9-10kg DM forage per day is needed for milking cows to maintain good rumen health.
- Ingredients like soya hulls, beet pulp, and palm kernel are high in fibre and work well to fill gaps. They can be fed at 2-3kg as a midday feed, or along with a night-time silage. They work much better for this purpose than cereals due to lower acidosis risk.
- Exercise caution if introducing co-product feeds such as fodder beet or potatoes. These should be treated as wet concentrates rather than 'fodder-stretchers'.
- Good quality feed straw (1-2kg) is an option to increase diet fibre where silage is scarce.
- Prioritize the highest quality silage to milking cows. Where silage DMD is poor (<68DMD) and supplies are tight, there is a large risk of causing digestive problems by 'slug-feeding' concentrates. Feed concentrates 3 times daily in this case.
- A typical milking diet would be 4-5kg grass by day, 5kg parlour concentrate, and 2.5kg beet pulp plus 5-6kg DM silage at night.

Dry cows and young stock

- Dry cows can be fed 2-3kg straw plus 2-3kg meal along with restricted silage. This will have no negative effect on calving difficulty.
- Dairy heifers need to be consuming at least 2.1% of liveweight (6.5+ kg DM) of high quality feed - supplement with 2kg high protein concentrate if short on forage.

For more detailed advice:

Contact your local Teagasc office to speak to a Professional Agricultural Advisor.