

Calf performance during their first grazing season

Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford

Optimising calf performance during their first season at pasture is essential to ensure that growth targets set out in the various production systems blueprints are achieved.

Following the calf rearing stage, calves are typically supplemented with concentrates until mid-May. They remain on a pasture only diet until early September and are again supplemented with 1.0 kg of concentrates daily until housing. This should lead to a typical animal performance of 0.80 kg ADG, achieving a targeted 230 kg live weight at housing in November.

A farm systems trial at Johnstown Castle investigated whether it is economical to feed calves additional concentrates at pasture in order to reach higher live weights at housing.

Trial design

After turn-out to pasture, calves were either supplemented at the typical level of 1.0 kg DM/head of concentrates daily or they were supplemented at a higher level of 2.0 kg DM/ head.

Results

Calves supplemented with 2.0 kg DM/ head of concentrates were 17 kg heavier at first housing than those offered 1.0 kg DM. However, this additional carcass weight did not offset the cost of the meal.

Conclusion

Extra concentrate supplementation at grass may benefit the 15 month bull system due to the higher weight for age requirement. Male dairy calves assigned to the 15 month bull production system require an ADG of at least 0.90 kg during this period to ensure that they are approximately 250 kg at housing in November. However, for other production systems, the extra supplementation at grass is an uneconomical practice.

