

flooding

Teagasc help available for flood-hit farmers

Teagasc was highly active during the flooding countrywide, working with partners and helping farmers to minimise the effect on their livelihoods and their animals' welfare. **Tom Kellegher*** reports

As we went to press, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD launched a scheme of assistance for farmers who have suffered fodder losses as a result of the severe flooding in recent weeks.

"I have witnessed first-hand the significant difficulties and losses experienced by farmers in areas flooded in recent weeks," the minister outlined. "I am committed to supporting these farmers and, in this regard, the Government has agreed to provide up to €2m for the new fodder scheme." This support will apply to the loss of silage, hay, straw and concentrates where there is evidence of damage caused by flooding and where the losses are not covered by insurance.

Application forms are available from Teagasc offices where advisors will continue to provide one-to-one advice to those impacted by flooding. On-farm visits will be undertaken by Department personnel in the case of all applicants for assistance under the Fodder Scheme to confirm the quantities of fodder lost due to the flooding. The closing date for applications is Friday 22 January.

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Taskforce

A multi-agency flood relief task force convened by Teagasc met in Athlone on 14 December. Teagasc, DAFM, IFA, Arrabawn Co-Op, Aurivo Co-Op, Veterinary Ireland and the OPW and the *Irish Farmers Journal* were represented.

Ninety (rising to 170) severely affected farmers had been visited. In some cases, the army helped advisors to make visits and a list was compiled and sent to DAFM. This information helped inform government decisions.

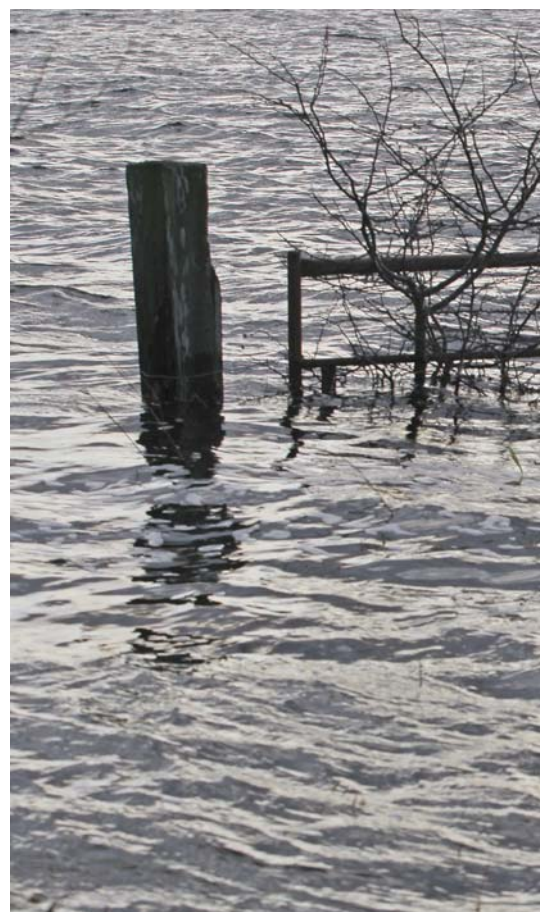
- These 90 were subsequently visited by DAFM officials and were allocated concentrate vouchers.
- A booklet on animal nutrition was prepared by Teagasc and distributed to affected farmers and media.
- A Teagasc helpline was set up pre-Christmas and has been manned since that date.
- A small number of farmers need to move stock out of flooded areas. Teagasc working with others identified farms/marts willing to take stock for the period of the floods.

"I think the response by my Teagasc colleagues demonstrates, yet again, both the depth of expertise within the organisation and the resolute determination of front-line advisors to assist farmers in their hour of need," said Prof Gerry Boyle, director of Teagasc.



Councillor Maura Hopkins, James Kelly, Teagasc, *Tom Kellegher, Teagasc Regional Manager, Minister Simon Coveney and Joe Curtin, Teagasc.

6 things to consider



1 Effect of flooding on forage crops >> Silage pits/clamps that had not been opened when the floods submerged them may undergo relatively modest damage. Silage pits/clamps that were open when the floods submerged them may undergo more extensive wetting and may release more effluent after the floods recede, and will likely have a larger loss of digestibility.

If the pH of this silage is below 4.0 after the flood recedes, there may not be a problem but if it is greater than 4.3, then deterioration is more likely.

Bales of silage that have been shifted by floods will likely have had their plastic film damaged. Bales that had some holes (even if small) in the plastic wrap film before being submerged in the flood will have taken in water.

A risk with all bales that are submerged is that water works its way in between the layers of film, wetting the silage. When the water recedes the seal through which water entered/left, the bale will not reseal.

It is therefore important to check the seal on bales and, if it is compromised, the only option (assuming the bale remains edible) would be to



re-wrap it. This may be difficult to do correctly if the bales have lost their cylindrical shape.

If hay becomes submerged in water, dampness can soak up to a greater height than the level of the flood water (as per blotting paper). When the flood recedes and surplus water flows out of the hay, the latter could still be only 30% to 40%DM and thus be prone to heating. If heating commences, all of the hay may need to be removed (separating the dry and wet/damp bales) in case heating gets excessive.

2 Animal nutrition >> If you have lost some silage due to flooding, then you need to consider how you can ration out existing fodder reserves to get you through the rest of the winter. It may be better to budget immediately to minimise the likelihood of running out of forage.

Rather than buying in extra forage, it may be worth considering feeding minimum roughage to all classes of stock for several weeks to make up the shortfall.

You should consider the following principles when feeding minimum roughage:

- Cattle need a minimum amount of

roughage to ensure healthy rumen function. The lowest level of roughage required is for ad-lib diets. Outside of this, animals will ideally be offered in the region of 50% of their nutritional requirement in the form of roughage.

- High performance is not a requirement, maintenance, plus minimal growth (0.2kg to 0.4 kg/day) is the objective for yearlings/stores.
- Maintenance of milk production without excessive weight loss is the target for suckler cows.
- Because we do not have high performance targets, some cheaper feeds can have a role in this emergency-feeding situation.

Contact your local advisor for the feed needs of individual stock categories.

3 Sheep >> Feed supplementation required for sheep during this present weather crisis needs to be targeted based on the type of feed available and the type of animals being fed. See also article on pages 23 to 25.

High-energy buckets or liquid feeders are an alternative feed source. These are predominantly molasses bases plus or minus protein ingredi-

ents. They are a useful supplement where the quality of forage (either grass or silage) is poor. They work out at a higher cost per unit energy supplied.

However, in practical terms, they present a viable option for situations where frequent access is limited. As a guide, you will need one high energy bucket (20kg) per 25 to 30 ewes. These should be spread out to allow greater access.

When offering liquid feed (molasses) via a lick, a general recommendation is for one ball per 50 ewes.

4 Animal health >> Flooding and contaminated waters increase the risk of disease to stock. We are already witnessing instances of acute fluke in sheep this year and we will have to be mindful of the potential for a higher incidence of rumen fluke on ground that has been flooded. Stock will be at a greater risk from salmonella, cryptosporidia, redwater, etc, so it is worth engaging with your local vet to determine what steps you should take to minimise the risk.

5 Vermin control >> With rising floodwater, rats have been on the move. They will naturally move to drier areas around the farm, so farm buildings and farm dwellings will be under a bigger threat of infestation.

Be vigilant, keep baiting points around the yard and dwelling regularly replenished.

6 Preventing future damage – use your camera >> In some farmyards, there may be potential to avoid the worst of the flooding at a future date by recording flood levels now. The best option is to mark the heights to where the flood reaches or to record by taking photos (camera phone) and storing these photos carefully.

These records may prove useful in future planning. Where the flooding is caused by running water, there may be an opportunity to redirect that water-flow to protect the farmyard, animal housing and feed storage areas.

Where the flooding is as a result of general high water levels, in some cases it may be possible to relocate bale storage areas or the siting of new buildings. It may even be possible to have a protective bank of soil put in place to offer limited protection to some flooding.

A record of flood levels is a good start.