

Plan now to have adequate winter feed

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The difficulties of spring 2018 have certainly faded with the improved weather during May and June. Grass growth has been excellent if not a little difficult to control and many people have secured high dry matter first cuts. However, silage yields around the country have been variable depending on closing dates and whether silage ground was grazed in the spring.

Given the variability in yields and the fact that virtually all farmers used up all their fodder reserves this spring, there is a job of work to be done to try to build up these reserves over the next few months.

In 2013, following a similarly prolonged winter feeding period we found ourselves in much the same position. Our strategy to build up fodder reserves will be broadly similar this year. With first-cut baled or in the pit you will have a better idea of how silage stocks are looking going into the winter. But there is a very real need for people to complete or update a fodder budget during July and Teagasc highlighted this at Beef 2018 in Grange on 26 June.

The fodder budget will address how much fodder has already been made in 2018, what additional fodder is planned for second-cut/surplus bales and how many stock you intend to carry next winter. It will enable you to predict whether you are likely to be going into the winter with a potential surplus or a deficit.

This fodder plan can be updated again in late September/October to give a more accurate picture of the situation. This is an essential exercise if you are to minimise and manage any potential deficit. It will also allow you to devise a feeding plan from the start of next winter if you are a bit short on feed, which will lessen the effect.

Martina Harrington, one of our drystock advisors in Wexford, outlines a detailed fodder budget for one of her clients as he tries to secure enough feed for this winter and build up a reserve.



Although winter seems some way off, fodder planning is essential at this stage and should be reviewed as we go through the summer and autumn.

In the meantime, consider how you can grow the extra fodder you need.

- Ground intended for second-cut silage should receive 70 to 90 units nitrogen/acre with the higher amount going on newer swards. Aim to have second cuts finished up by 1 August.

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- Continue to spread 20 to 30 units nitrogen after each grazing. This will allow you to take out surplus grass, which will add to reserves. It also acts as a management tool to keep grass

quality optimum.

- If you feel that you will still be short of silage this winter you need to consider how you can balance demand and there are a number of options to consider:

- Can extra fodder be sourced locally at reasonable cost?

- Can I have empty/cull cows or store cattle fit for sale/slaughter early in the winter?

- Finishing animals can be fed on ad-lib concentrate and minimum silage.

- Use additional concentrates to stretch fodder supplies from housing.

- Is there an option for you to use alternative feeds such as fodder beet/maize silage?

Although winter seems some way off, fodder planning is essential at this stage and should be continually reviewed as we go through the summer and autumn. Your local advisor will be happy to discuss the various options with you.