

Fodder Budget – Planning for Winter 2021

By Eddie Webb, B&T Soils & Environment Adviser, Teagasc Galway/Clare

Now that the silage season is approaching completion, it's a good time to take stock of the amount of fodder standing in the yard. This exercise will highlight your position as regards the amount of fodder you have so that you enough for the stock that you intend to carry over the winter period. In previous years farmers have budgeted for a 140 day winter which doesn't allow for an early winter or late spring. With recent bad winters, I would advise farmers to budget for a 150 day winter to allow one to have buffer in event that the winter period is extended.

The first exercise that a farmer should carry out in a fodder budget is to determine the amount of silage required on the farm. Completion of the below table should highlight the current fodder requirement on the farm.

SECTION 1: What fodder is required on the farm?				
Animal type	A	B	C	
	No. of stock to be kept over winter	Number of months	Pit silage needed/ animal/month	Total tonnes of silage needed – multiply AxBxC
Dairy cows			1.6	
Suckler cows			1.4	
0-1 year old			0.7	
1-2 year old			1.3	
2+ year old			1.3	
Ewes			0.15	
Total tonnes needed				Tonnes <input type="text" value="X"/>
or				or
Total bales needed (tonnes multiplied by 1.1)				Bales <input type="text" value="Y"/>

So if a farmer had 40 suckler cows; 40 1-2 years and 40 weanlings in his herd, the requirement on his farm would be:

40 cows x 1.4 tonnes/month x 5 = 280 tonnes
 40 1-2 years old x 1.3 tonnes/month x 5 = 260 tonnes
 40 0-1 year old x 0.7 tonnes/month x 5 = 140 tonnes

Therefore the total silage requirement on the farm is 680 tonnes.

The next exercise is to determine how much silage is in the yard and the below table will make this position clear

SECTION 2: How much silage is in the yard?

Farms with pit and bale silage	A	Pit silage ¹	
	B	Bales – in the yard	
	C	Bales, converted to equivalent of pit silage (Multiply B by 0.9)	
	D	Total silage (A+C)	D
Farms with bale silage only	E	Total bales	

¹ Pit silage (length x breadth x settled height) metres ÷ 1.35 = tonnes (t) equivalent.

If the silage in the silo is 28 metres long x 10 metres wide and 2.7 metres deep, this equates to 756 metres cube of silage. This equates to 560 tonnes of silage (756/1.35). Similarly if the farmer had 550 bales of silage in the yard, this would equate to 495 tonnes (450 x 0.9 = 405 tonnes).

The fodder situation may need to be revaluated on the farm in the event of an early winter. When animals are housed early, your requirement for silage will have increased accordingly. Where a fodder deficit is identified, it is imperative to act early to avoid a situation where silage stocks run out completely on the farms. The option for reducing demand on the farms include:

1. Sell off cull cows/empty cows
2. Sell store cattle
3. Put finishing cattle on meals and minimal silage

The alternative feed options include:

1. Buying silage – pit/bales
2. Buying ration to fill the gap
3. Buying alternative forages such as maize silage, whole crop cereal silage or fodder beet.

If there is a silage deficit and this deficit is being met by ration supplementation, it's important that there is sufficient head room for all the animals to feed at the same time. Two feet of head space is required for suckler cows whilst one and half is advised for weanlings or drystock.

There are more elaborate computer programmes to help famers to carry out a fodder budget. These programmes take into account various factors including days of concentrate supplementation and dry matter of the silage.

I would encourage all farmers to get in touch with their Agriculture Advisor to carry out a fodder budget in order to avoid any silage deficits and plan remedial actions to counteract same.