

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday 8th November 2019

BEEF

October Grass - Spring Grass

October grass is spring grass – so don't graze it in November! About two-thirds of the grass grazed in spring (February/ March) is grass that grew during October/early November. Therefore it is essential that fields/paddocks closed during October stay closed until spring. What is grazed now won't be available in the spring. Remember every day the animal is at grass next spring is worth about €2/LU/day. Autumn grass is worth a lot less.

The priority now is to close the farm. Every one week delay in closing will cost your farm 100kg of grass DM/ha in spring. The target is to have a minimum of 50% of the farm closed by November 1. Block grazing and back fencing are useful tools to help get the grazing job completed. Using a strip wire and moving animals once a day will improve the level of grass utilised and achieve greater clean out of paddocks.

Should I Vaccinate My Weanlings?

This is a topic that is often discussed at knowledge transfer (KT) group meetings. Respiratory diseases are by far the most common cause of ill-health and death in young stock over the winter housing period. When a pneumonia outbreak occurs in a herd there is usually a fire-brigade type response to it.

Unlike with a fire though, it is rarely stopped immediately. That is why the costs mount up. Apart from the cost, a pneumonia outbreak can be very stressful for the farmer involved. Virus pneumonia affects the best calves in a herd just as much as the worst calves. It takes a lot of time and effort to get a group of sick animals back on track. By far the best approach all round is to avoid a pneumonia outbreak in the first place and this is where vaccines have a real role to play.

The cost of a preventative vaccination programme against the most common of the pneumonia N viruses would be less than 20% of the cost of such an outbreak. To ensure maximum cover is provided it is necessary with most vaccination programmes that a booster shot, as well as the initial primary shot, is given. These are usually three to four weeks apart, so plan ahead.

DAIRY

Winter Management of Weanling Replacement Heifers

Weanling heifers should be managed to achieve gains of at least 0.5kg/day and 0.7kg/day for on-target and lighter heifers respectively over the winter period. To achieve such gains the following actions need to take place now:

1. Treat heifers for parasites at or shortly after housing.
2. Segregate light from on-target/above-target heifers – the target liveweight for November 1 is approximately 220kg for Holstein Friesian heifers.
3. Feed heifers according to the quality of the silage and liveweight. On 67% DMD well-preserved grass silage underweight heifers will require 1.5-2.0kg concentrate/day.
4. Ensure that there is 0.3m (1ft) of feeding space per heifer – particularly for the lighter heifers – available at all times while they are indoors or performance will be reduced.
5. Plan to turn the lighter heifers out to grass in early February.

SHEEP

Lamb Thrive

Many farms are finding themselves behind target in terms of the number of lambs drafted. At this time of year grass needs to be prioritised for the breeding ewes. If grass supply on the farm is getting tight, the option of housing forward stores and finishing them indoors is a good choice.

Lambs lighter than 30kg should remain outdoors, possibly on 300g concentrate per head per day, as intensive finishing of these indoors is uneconomic. If you don't have the grass available consider selling these lambs as stores.

TILLAGE

Winter Barley – Late Planting

Winter barley sown past the optimum date in a region should only be considered if field conditions are excellent. Winter barley won't tolerate being 'mucked in'. This will lead to poor establishment and potential crop failure. Heavy rain after sowing can also lead to poor establishment.

Final yield in barley is closely related to the number of grains per unit area and the main factor influencing grain number is ear number per unit area. Late-sown crops accumulate less thermal time to GS39 and produce fewer leaves. Consequently, tiller numbers are reduced by late sowing leading to fewer ears/m². Seed rates in excess of 310 seeds/m² are required, e.g., Kosmos (thousand grain weight (TGW) 51g) 225kg/ha (14.3st/ac) or KWS Cassia (TGW 54g) 239kg/ha (15.2st/ac) at 70% establishment. Higher seed rates will not compensate for delayed sowing, even if establishment is good, and may be uneconomic.

