

## Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday June 14<sup>th</sup> 2019

### Sheep Notes

In the lead up to weaning, it can be a challenge to get a balance between the quality of grass and the quantity required. The aim is to have good quality leafy grass available for ewes and lambs. What is important:

1. Good quality means grass that is no more than 7-9cm long (1,250-1,500kg DM/ha).
2. Paddocks should be grazed out quickly by keeping the time in the paddock short. This can be done by using temporary divisions,
3. In many cases paddocks weren't grazed out satisfactorily in earlier rotations due to the heavy covers of grass on many farms. To maintain quality, paddocks that weren't grazed out correctly could benefit from being topped
4. Where grass growth is strong and ahead of what the flock needs, the grazing days ahead should be reduced to 10 days in early to mid-June (if measuring grass, 200kg DM per LU).
5. Farmers who have excess grass supplies on the grazing area should consider taking lighter cuts off these grazing paddocks now.
6. Fertiliser applications should be kept up during June with a guideline of a further 12-18kg per hectare (10-15 units/acre) of fertiliser applied.

### Beef Notes

#### AI in Suckler Herds

Only 20% of calves born annually on Irish suckler beef herds are bred from AI. While most farmers will agree that AI presents flexibility and advantages in terms of breeding options and genetic improvement, logistical issues and land fragmentation in many beef herds mitigate against its widespread use. One key advantage of AI is that the semen is rigorously monitored for fertility and is of high quality. Heat detection aids are critical to the success of AI in a suckler herd. Monitor farmers are reporting great success to electronic heat detection systems.

The importance of quality replacement heifers in beef herds is becoming increasingly recognised. One of the primary objectives of the current Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is to improve the genetic merit of the national beef herd, particularly with regard to maternal traits in the cow. In order to meet the requirements of the programme there is undoubtedly a role for AI in most herds.

There has been increasing interest in the use of heat synchronisation programmes, which allow the use of timed AI (TAI). This involves all treated cows being inseminated at a pre-determined time, regardless of signs of heat. Teagasc, together with UCD and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) of Northern Ireland conducted a series of on-farm synchronisation studies, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). The work involved 85 herds located throughout the island of Ireland, with 2,200 cows enrolled in the studies.

Three different synchronisation protocols were compared, all of which used a progesterone pessary (PRID E, CEVA Animal Health), inserted for seven days. All cows were subjected to a single TAI at 72 hours after PRID removal, regardless of signs of heat. Herd owners were free to use the semen of their choice, and thus semen from a large number of bulls was used across the studies. Despite this, pregnancy rates ranged from 50-70%, with a very acceptable overall average pregnancy rate of 55% achieved to a single timed insemination.

Synchronisation also led to a more condensed calving pattern and subsequent breeding period in the following season. In a typical herd, almost 80% of all synchronised cows were pregnant within 23 days of the start of the breeding season. While many herds elected to AI cows that repeated, others turned out stock bulls. This latter practice is very efficient from a labour and stock bull use viewpoint and allows a herd to use maternal genetics through TAI and focus on terminal traits in their stock

bull(s). For comprehensive information on these topics, farmers are encouraged to contact their local Teagasc adviser and veterinary surgeon.

### **Silage Making**

Weather conditions have been poor in recent days but don't panic when it comes to silage making. Silage quality is deteriorating by 3 units of DMD per week. But its always better to have dry well preserved silage of a lower DMD in the pit rather than wet poorly preserved silage with higher DMD which has poor intake characteristics. Only cut grass for silage when you know you are going to be able to pick it up within 48 hours under good conditions.

There are some reports of silage pits splitting. If no drainage is used there is a chance that the silage will split and shift forward under the pressure of trapped effluent. Please ensure that there is adequate drainage to take away the effluent. If it does split, there is really only one option and that's start from scratch with the pit. Its not a very palatable option, but otherwise wastage will be much higher. Also be very careful around split pits.

### **Teagasc Beef Event**

Teagasc will hold a Beef Farm Walk on the farm of James Madigan, Derrynahinch, Ballyhale on Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> June at 11am. This event will focus on:

1. The requirements of the BDGP scheme – Chris Daly from ICBF will be in attendance to discuss
2. A demonstration of weighing for the BEEF scheme
3. A discussion on cattle thrive and maintaining good grass quality of the summer

