

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday March 1st

DAIRY

Calf Welfare

It is timely to review the guidelines around handling calves for transport because of the increasing number of young calves moving off their birth farms. Calving has become increasingly concentrated in the months of February and March on dairy farms e.g. in 2018, 37% of calves (538,000) were born in February. Calves destined for sale must be given the same standard of care as every other calf on the farm. Good on-farm management is essential as calves that are well cared for prior to transportation are more likely to be fit on arrival. All calves must be:

- fed colostrum (follow the 1-2-3 rule; first feed within 2 hours of birth, feed 3 litres of colostrum);
- fed twice daily with adequate milk or milk replacer and have free access to water at all times;
- kept clean and dry with bedding;
- handled gently at all times.

When transporting calves the following factors must be taken into consideration:

- Calves should not be transported under ten days old unless they are travelling a distance under 100km;
- Calves should have a completely dry and withered navel;
- Calves must be correctly identified and have the correct documentation;
- Suitable bedding (straw) should be added to vehicle floors to assist absorption of urine and faeces, to minimise slipping and protect animals from hard flooring surfaces.

Continuous removal of calves from the birth farm will relieve the pressure on accommodation and labour. Calf numbers can build up for a number of reasons – weather, disease breakdown or a lack of demand in the market place. Where the number of calves on the farm increases and accommodation is inadequate, use temporary shelters to relieve overcrowding indoors.

You have a good idea now of the number of calves you will have at peak this coming spring – have you thought through how they will be accommodated? What is your contingency plan if 20% more calves than normal remain on farm for an extra 4 weeks?

BEEF

Decision Support Guidance for Early N Decision Making on your farm

Check	Consider	Where to check
Soil Temperature	No growth below 5.5°C	Met Eireann
Soil moisture conditions	When conditions allow prioritise dry soils for early spreading first. If soils are saturated or near saturated (SMD -10 to 0) soil structure damage from machines is likely to occur	Met Eireann
Forecast	Predicted forecast for cold weather (air temp <40C) – little growth. Forecast for wet weather – N loss likely	Met Eireann
Grass Growth Rate	Grass growth rates / expected grass response to N fertiliser of less than 5kg dry mater / ha will not	On-farm measurement or Pasturebase Ireland (PBI)

cover the cost of N
fertiliser

Rate	Economic response is more likely at lower N rates	No more than 30kg / ha
Current sward	Higher sward grass cover will have a higher N uptake rate compared to low or bare swards. Swards reseeded in the last 3-5 years have better N utilisation.	Farmer knowledge Minimum cover of 300-40kg DM Cattle slurry to bare swards, recently reseeded fields
Choosing area of the farm	Start with the kind sheltered fields, avoid watercourses	Farmer knowledge

HEALTH & SAFETY

Keep Safe as workload increases

Workload on farms increases in February. Tiredness and hurrying lead to accidents, particularly during busy periods. It is vital to maintain concentration on health and safety to avoid accidents when you are busy. Accessing heights is an area to think about, as the risk of a fatality is seven times greater when at a height. Using a ladder, especially in a hurry, is a high-risk task. Alternatives to using a ladder should be considered. When using a ladder, ensure that it is sound and is adequately supported and secured. Also, keep walkways clear of trip hazards and ensure lighting is adequate to prevent ground level trip hazards.