

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday March 15th

DAIRY

Feeding the Herd to Prepare for Breeding

Most farms are just catching breath after the peak calving period. However, it is important to look ahead to the coming breeding season, and make sure that the herd is in good nutritional status ahead of the start date for mating.

1. Check the body condition score (BCS) of cows calved for three weeks or more. The target is to have all cows at 2.75 or above in one month's time. Are cows too thin, or beginning to 'turn the corner' and gain weight?
2. Very thin individual cows can be milked once a day until the start of breeding. This will help to recover BCS before breeding starts. Overall milk losses will be small.
3. If the whole herd is looking thin, check the daily feed allowance. Post-grazing height should be at 3.5-4cm for the end of the first round, but it is vital that cows are also on a rising plane of nutrition. Consult your Teagasc adviser for feeding options.
4. Make sure that later-calving dry cows are fed correctly to minimise problems. Continue to feed the correct amount of minerals. Offer lower-energy forage to prevent excess weight gain.
5. If there is a history of mineral issues on the farm, take some fresh grass samples from second round paddocks for analysis. Sample four to five representative paddocks and adjust April-May mineral supplementation if needed.

BEEF

Grassland Targets

A lot of beef farmers are a month ahead of normal when it comes to their grassland management in 2019. The mild, dry weather has meant that both nitrogen (N) and stock have been put out earlier.

1. The plan for March should be to put out more stock as the month progresses and to start planning the next round of fertiliser.
2. For most beef farms, the first grazing rotation should not end until the second week in April.
 - a. Only graze enough ground each week so that this end point is reached.
 - b. Finishing earlier than this runs the risk of going back into regrowths that are too low and could leave you short of grass in April, especially if the weather turns unfavourable.
 - c. Taking too long to finish the first rotation is also not to be recommended, as grass quality during April will be badly affected due to very heavy covers of grass building in the second rotation.
3. For many, the second round of fertiliser should be a high phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) compound such as 18:6:12.
 - a. Applying 1.5 bags per acre is recommended as it provides a worthwhile amount of N, P and K at a time of the year that the grass plant can make good use of them.
 - b. When enough grass covers are grazed off, use the opportunity to get most of your slurry spread during March.
 - c. It is well proven that spreading slurry at this time of the year compared to spreading it during the summer allows the N in the slurry to be of better use to the grass plant.

SHEEP

Colostrum

Getting colostrum into newborn lambs early is vital. Firstly, it provides a dense source of energy and nutrients; secondly, it acts as a source of maternally derived antibodies that provide the lambs with passive immunity; and lastly, it also acts as a laxative to help clean the digestive tract.

Lambs should receive 50ml of colostrum per kg within the first six hours of life and 200ml per kg within the first 24 hours of life. A guideline amount for lambs is summarised in Table 1. The birth

weights are a guide to what the average might be for each birth type. When stomach tubing lambs, it's important to ensure equipment is kept clean and disinfected with a suitable product between use – i.e., don't introduce infection.

Table 1. Colostrum Feeding Rates for newborn lambs

Single	6	300ml	1,200ml
Twin	5	250ml	1,000ml
Triplet	4	200ml	800ml

Not all ewes will have sufficient colostrum. Where possible, always try to ensure that each lamb receives some of its own mother's colostrum to facilitate transfer of passive immunity – another freshly lambed ewe would also aid this process. Cow colostrum can provide a substitute but it will need to be used at a higher rate (30% more) than the recommended sheep levels. In addition, it is recommended to mix it from a number of cows to avoid anaemia. Following this, there are a number of artificial

Health & Safety

Maternal cows can be deadly

Cow- and heifer-related farm deaths account for 50% of all livestock fatalities and 7% of all farm deaths. An Irish medical study indicated that 65% of non-fatal livestock-related injuries were cow related, leading to an average hospital stay of 10 days. A further medical study recently described the force of being attacked by a cow as similar to being struck by a juggernaut. Spring time, when newly born calves are being handled or treated, is a particularly high-risk period. The key safety message is to create a sound physical barrier when treating or tagging calves. Also, maternal aggressiveness is a heritable trait, so don't breed from such cows.

Upcoming events

Teagasc, in conjunction with the Irish Farmers Journal, will be running two farm walks in April on BETTER Farm Beef Challenge farms. The first will take place on Maurice Hearne's farm in Dunmore East, Co. Waterford on Tuesday, April 4 at 2.00pm. Maurice has a 110-cow autumn-calving suckler herd, with bull calves finished under 16 months and heifers finished off grass.

