IRELAND'S DAIRY & BEEF NUTRITION BULLETIN

Expert Animal feed advice and updates from Specialist Nutrition to maximise performance on Irish farms

Specialist Nutrition
Animal Feed Solutions

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Issue 10

VIEW FROM THE FARM

Weather is finally improving and livestock are being turned out. This brings its own workload and it's often the small details that get missed at this time of year.

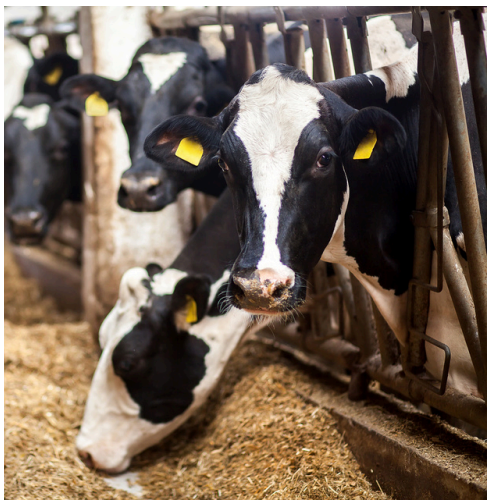
Water, often described as the forgotten nutrient, is an area I find is overlooked, especially at turnout. It's not that water isn't available, but its quality is often questionable. Many troughs have been left sitting with stagnant water for months and this becomes a breeding ground for problems.

When you consider a dairy cow will consume 3.5 to 5 times the volume of milk she produces in water, access to clean, fresh, palatable water is essential.

Buffer feed

Compliments what the cows are getting from the grazed grass while also supplementing energy which will help maintain production and body condition, which is vitally important in the run up to breeding. Assess what nutrients cows are already getting from spring grass, protein, fibre, dry matter, and energy, then provide only the extra feed they need indoors to balance their diet.

Often the dry matter of grass is its most limiting factor, especially when dealing with fresh calved cows where intake is limited after calving.



The temptation to just feed extra nuts through the parlour/robot might be appealing but I would warn you that the combination of rapidly fermentable carbohydrates, starch and decreasing fibre levels in the diet could lead to digestive problems and have a negative impact on production.

The buffer feed is also a great way to get any extra mineral and rumen buffers into milking cows. Cold nights can bring on grass tetany issues so be sure to ensure Cal-mag demands are being met. Other minerals like copper, zinc, calcium and phosphorus are important for maintaining production, fertility and health.

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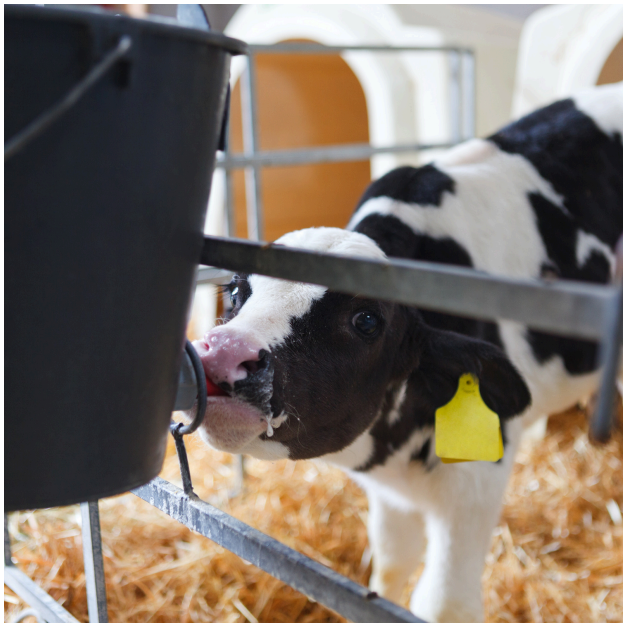
Calves

Most farmers will have calves at least a month old and here the assumption would be that they are out of harm's way in my experiences it is this time of year when we can experience the most problems.

This is possibly down to a combination of bacteria build up in the bedding as well fluctuating weather conditions and inconsistent ventilation, all of which can weaken calf immunity and create an ideal environment for disease to take hold.

This spring is the first season that Specialist Nutrition have used AuraCalf on farm and so far the results have been very encouraging.

Farmers are reporting little to no issues with coccidiosis or crypto scours and even in cases where outbreaks have occurred, recovery rates have been notably quick.



Diease Management

I recently had the opportunity to attend a webinar on Mycoplasma. While some farmers may already be familiar with the disease, one point that stood out to me was that it can be passed to calves through colostrum. Mycoplasma can present in several forms, including pneumonia, middle ear infections and lameness. A severe outbreak will see high incidence of morbidity and mortality.

This raises the importance of detecting the disease early so that farmers can be fully informed of their herd status. A bulk tank milk ELISA test can be carried out to screen your herd for Mycoplasma exposure. This will indicate whether your cows have previously been exposed to the organism. If you need to investigate sick calves, a PCR test can be performed on nasal swabs or serum to detect active Mycoplasma infection. Your vet will advise you on the most appropriate testing strategy for your farm and help you put an effective control plan in place.

maintaining clean equipment, a clean calving environment and minimising stress in young calves all play a role in reducing the risk of infection. As with many diseases, prevention is far more effective than treatment and early awareness allows farmers to make informed decisions to protect calf health and overall herd performance.

If you'd like support reviewing your feeding or herd health strategy, we're here to help.

Wishing you a productive grazing season.
-Nigel

SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHTS

OPTICUT - TAKE CONTROL WITH FORAGE

TAKING A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO GRASS SILAGE MAKING WILL IMPROVE FORAGE QUALITY, BOOSTING MILK FROM FORAGE AND TAKING CONTROL OF COSTS.

If we are serious about producing more from forage, then we have to increase the quantities of high quality forage fed and ensure less is wasted. This will mean changing our whole approach to making grass silage because year in year out, irrespective of weather conditions, grass silage analysis remains stubbornly around 10.5MJ when it is possible to make silage consistently above 11MJ and a target of 11.5MJ is perfectly achievable.

We need to learn from the grazers who know that to maximise quality and quantity you need to harvest the crop more often and when it is at its optimum. We must move away from three large cuts of more mature grass with lower energy and poorer digestibility.

The Opticut approach is based on more frequent cutting of higher quality material and has a number of significant benefits.

BETTER QUALITY SILAGE

Cutting grass late leaves energy in the field. By cutting grass at the optimum, before increasing maturity and lignification compromise quality, you get a higher quality forage.

SILAGE COWS WANT TO EAT MORE OF

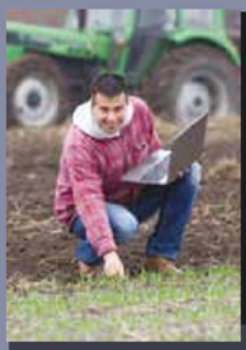
More frequent cutting will give a silage with a higher content of digestible NDF. As grass matures, for example when it starts to head, two things happen. Firstly, the total NDF content increases and secondly the level of indigestible NDF increases leading to a silage with lower energy and digestibility. Both of these can lead to reduced performance. Too much indigestible fibre will have a 'bulk' effect and can reduce dry matter intake.

REDUCED RISK & EASED WORKLOAD PEAKS

By harvesting more often you are making smaller cuts. This can make it easier to get the silage making process carried out quicker, meaning you are less exposed to weather risks and the impact bad weather has on silage quality. You also have a smaller proportion of total harvest exposed at any one time

FOLLOW THE OPTICUT PROGRAMME FOR BETTER QUALITY FORAGE

PLANNING



DECIDE TARGET CUTTING DATE
plan for a 28 day cutting interval and for cutting pre-ear emergence

DECIDE AREA TO CUT
based on grazing platform required and measured grass covers

CORRECT FERTILISER
apply sufficient fertiliser for planned cutting interval

CONTACT THE CONTRACTOR
make sure they know your plan

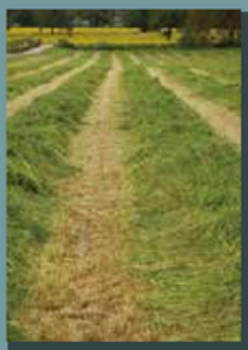
PRE CUT

TEST GRASS
don't rely on visual assessment. Test grass weekly for fermentation criteria and forage quality

PRE-CUT TARGETS
NDF between 38- 40%, ME greater than 11.5MJ Free nitrates less than 1000mg/kg fresh weight, Sugars more than 15% of DM

CROP HEIGHT
target to cut when grass is 20-25cm high and at early boot/flag leaf stage

CUTTING



CUT HEIGHT
leave a 6cm stubble to allow rapid regrowth

CUT AND SPREAD
use a conditioning spreading mower or spread grass immediately

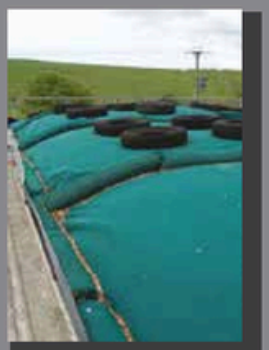
SILAGE IN A DAY
only cut the grass that can be picked up within 24 hours after wilting to improve DM consistency and reduce nutrient losses

MAXIMUM 24 HOUR WILT
don't over wilt and aim for 30-35% DM when harvested

MANAGE THE WILT
if drying slowly spread grass out. If drying too fast do not spread and row up 2-3 hours ahead of the forager

USE THE APPROPRIATE INOCULANT
choose the Lallemand crop and condition specific inoculant for the crop being harvested

CLAMPING



LAYERS NOT A WEDGE
build the clamp in small (25cm) layers across the whole clamp, rolling continuously

SHEET AT NIGHT
if the clamp isn't finished, always sheet at night

KEEP IT LOW
never build the clamp above 3m high and keep it below the height of the clamp walls

REVIEW - ESTIMATE HOW MUCH HAS BEEN MADE AS START OF PLANNING NEXT CUT

DLF Spring Reseeding CHECKLIST

Reseeding can seem like a big investment, but if the job is done well you will reap the benefits many years after the initial outlay.

Following our spring reseeding checklist will help ensure you get the best value from your reseed by producing more tons of quality grass, improving grass utilisation on your farm and making your business more profitable.

DR.THOMAS MOLONEY
TECHNICAL PRODUCT MANAGER

1. **IDENTIFY PADDOCKS THAT NEED RESEEDING BASED ON:**

a. Lower than average yield
b. High weed burden
c. Poor response to fertiliser
d. Poor grazeout

2. **CONSIDER YOUR SYSTEM**

Do you need a grazing mix, a silage mix or a dual purpose mix? There are loads of grass mixtures and varieties to choose from and each has different qualities that make them more suited to particular kinds of management. Look for mixtures that use varieties with the traits that your system requires.

3. **ENSURE ADEQUATE SOIL FERTILITY**

Low pH means poor nutrient availability for grass and can reduce clover establishment while low P and K will lead to poor root development and reduce grass yield.

4. **SPRAY OFF THE OLD SWARD**

Allow at least 10 days for the old grass to die off. Not giving chemicals time to work or not applying the correct rates is a major issue on farm.

DLF Spring Reseeding CHECKLIST

5. PREPARE A FINE, FIRM, SEEDBED

If tilling ground ensure there are no clods of old sward or air pockets. Don't sow seed deeper than 1cm.

6. **ROLL, ROLL, ROLL.**

Always roll the seedbed after sowing. If possible even roll the seedbed before sowing seed. This extra roll will greatly increase germination rate and improve the chances of success.

7. **WEED CONTROL**

Be vigilant in the 6 weeks post-sowing. Check reseeds regularly and take action with appropriate herbicide as soon as possible if there is any sign of a weed problem.

8. **GRAZE**

New reseeds should be ready to graze after at least 6 weeks or when plants pass the 'pull test'. The first grazing is critical to establishing a thick healthy sward of grass. Use sheep or young stock where possible to avoid damage. Continue to graze low covers for the first 2 to 3 rotations.

9 .FEED TO YIELD

Modern grass varieties are high quality, high performance machines and therefore need fuel to perform to the best of their ability. Regular applications of N, P & K fertiliser is essential for optimal grass growth and quality that will persist for many years

GRAZING OR CUTTING?

What to look out for in Irish Grass Seed Mixtures this year

If you reseed just because you feel 'you need to reseed' or buy a grass mixture because that's what the neighbours use, then you may get a poor return for your investment. Identify the field or paddock to reseed based on how much grass it typically grows or the level of weeds in the sward. Consider how you manage this piece of land and choose the appropriate grass mixture to best do the job you want it for.

GRASS SEED IS THE CHEAPEST PART OF RESEEDING BUT CHOOSING THE WRONG SEED CAN TURN OUT EXPENSIVE!

Below we look at some of the key requirements of grass mixtures and varieties to use in grazing and cutting systems. The traits highlighted are all rated and ranked on the Pasture Profit Index (PPI).

GRASS TRAITS FOR GRAZING:

1. UTILISATION:
The number one trait to look for in a grazing mixture is its utilisation score. The best grazing mixtures contain a high level of tetraploid varieties with the best utilisation. Mixtures with this trait are easier for cows to graze, leave lower grazing residuals and have higher intakes of top quality grass. Make sure the grazing mixture you buy has as many 5 star utilisation varieties as possible!

2. SPRING AND AUTUMN GROWTH:
Having mixtures with strong spring growth will allow early turnout while autumn production will extend the grazing season in the backend. Spring growth is especially important in spring calving or lambing systems where a plentiful supply of high quality, low-cost forage is critical to farm profitability.

3. QUALITY:
Grass quality drives production and higher quality grass tends to be more palatable to grazing livestock. Grass utilisation and grass quality are closing linked and the more high quality grass we can utilise the more profitable our systems will be.

GRASS TRAITS FOR SILAGE:

1. TOTAL DRY MATER YIELD:

When making silage the first requirement is to make enough to get through a winter that could last up to 6 months depending on location and weather. Increasingly, silage is required to fill forage deficits caused by summer drought which places further importance on mixtures producing big enough crops. The silage figure on the PPI is a combined value for first and second cut yield and is a good indicator of how a variety will perform in this kind of system.

2. HEADING DATE SPREAD:

Typically, silage mixtures will contain both Intermediate and Late heading grass varieties. Intermediate varieties will help boost the yield of first-cuts taken in mid to late May while Lates will maintain quality in these crops. If you know first cut harvest will not take place until at least June 1st then it may be a good idea to choose a mix with only Late heading varieties as Intermediates may reduce quality in this scenario.

QUALITY:

As with grazing, choosing varieties and mixtures with string quality scores will increase silage quality and improve animal performance. The key to silage making is striking the balance between yield and quality.