

Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Newsletter

25 June 2021

Farmer Update

Peter and Thomas O'Hanrahan Farm Update

We are in tricky time for grassland management on the farm here and we're putting in steps to avoid grass getting too far ahead of stock. Once first-cut silage ground comes back into the grazing rotation, our grazing area increases significantly and our grazing demand reduces.



Location	System	Soil type	Stocking rate (LU/ha)	Net margin (€/ha)
Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny	24-month Holstein Friesian steers and 26-month early-maturing steers	Free draining	2.25	573
Date	Growth (kg DM/ha/day)	Demand (kg DM/ha/day)	Days ahead	Stocking rate (LU/ha)
16/06/2021	77	60	18	5
Animal category	Weight (kg)	Grass intake (kg DM/head/day)	Meal input	Silage input (kg/head/day)
Early-maturing steers (2019-born)	580	11.6	0	0
Steers (2020-born)	425	8.5	0	0
Calves (early)	146	3	0	0
Calves (late)	100	0.5	1.5	0

Over the past number of years, animal performance has suffered slightly from mid-season up to housing as we often had too much grass and not enough mouths to eat it down.

We've a large area of older grasses on the farm and these really let us down in terms of performance during the months of March, April and up to mid-May.

To counteract act this and to ensure that the targeted covers are maintained ahead of stock from now until housing, we've sprayed off 20ac for reseeding, which will be completed once a significant amount of rainfall arrives.

In terms of meal supplementation, the first batch of 130 calves have just finished being offered meal at grass.

Initially, at turnout, these animals were offered 2kg/head/day and it was wound down to approximately 1kg/head/day before being removed completely.



Summer scour syndrome has been an issue on the farm here in past springs with calves. To counteract this, we turned calves out on to heavier, less lush covers, continued to offer meal and ensured calves had free access to straw when in paddocks. Thankfully, this has worked and the early batch of calves are now at the stage where their rumens are fully developed and are ready to move onto after grass.

Calf rearing on the farm here is split in two batches and the later group of calves are being turned out to grass currently. Although a cost to the system, these animals will remain on concentrates for the entire grazing season. On account of their younger age, I just fell it's too much of an ask for these calves to move directly on to an all grass diet.

Regardless of calf age, concentrate supplementation will be reintroduced to all calves in early September. I don't like getting tied to a specific date as weather conditions can be favourable in late August. If grass dry matters drop rapidly, calves have to work too hard on lower dry matter grasses to meet their daily intake requirements; if they have to work too hard, they will struggle to achieve their daily liveweight gain target of 0.8-0.9kg/head/day from September up until housing.

In terms of fertiliser, we have reduced the area of second cut required due to the bulk achieved from first cut, the carryover of 150 bales from last year and the availability of surplus bales from grazing paddocks. Any decisions on taking out paddocks for bales will be made on the basis of growth rates and weather forecast.

We've applied 18:6:12 to grow our second cut silage crop, as straight nitrogen and slurry were used for first cuts, while grazing ground has received 27un/ac of straight nitrogen over the last two weeks.

Drafting of early-maturing animals off grass has also commenced, with the first 16 slaughtered last week. These steers averaged 300kg carcasses at just over 26 months, with a lifetime concentrate input of 382kg.

Key Management Tips

- Weigh all stock mid season, best practice is to weigh each category of stock on the one day so as to get a group average for performance
- Spraying for weeds- Mid summer is the ideal time to spray weeds such as docks, rushes, buttercup and thistles. Ensure to follow manufacturers guidelines when spraying and to spray at the correct stage of growth for maximum efficiency
- Introduce meal to finishing stock. 3-4 kg of a high energy concentrate may be introduced to finishing stock at grass to ensure adequate fat score
- Grassland management- take out surplus paddocks. Some paddocks may need to be topped post grazing to improve quality

Targets for third season cattle

Carrying animals for a third season and slaughtering directly of grass in May/June may be a viable production system for some farms. This is particularly the case where sufficient space is not available to carry all calves at once during the rearing period or where cash flow is targeted during the summer months. With this system, output on a per hectare basis is somewhat limited and instead a focus must be placed on maximising individual animal

26-month early-maturing steers

- Suited to late (March/April spring born bull calves.
- Finished off grass during the third grazing season in June.
- Carcass target weight of 320kg at O+3+.
- Lifetime daily gain of 0.75kg required.
- Typical lifetime concentrate input of 450kg.
- Must gain 120kg in the 3-4 month window post-turnout in the third grazing season.
- Grazed grass, silage and concentrates account for 52%, 26% and 22% respectively of the animals overall diet.

28-month Holstein Friesian steers

- Suited to early born Holstein Friesian steers (January/February).
- Steers are returned to grass for a third grazing season where daily gains of 1.2kg are targeted from turnout to slaughter.
- A carcass weight of 350kg is targeted.
- Lifetime concentrate input for animals produced under this system is 500kg.
- Grazed grass, silage and concentrates account for 65%, 26% and 9% respectively of the animal's overall diet.

Slaughter Performance on the Teagasc Greenacres Farm

Although not as severe of a year in terms of beef market upsets as 2019, 2020 still remained rather challenging in terms of price on the Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme farms. Winter finishers were particularly hard hit during the opening quarter of the year on account of depressed beef price returns. The below section provides a breakdown of the slaughter performance witnessed on the Teagasc Green Acres farms in 2020 and highlights the financial and physical returns achieved from the market. A total of 979 animals were slaughtered by farmers participating in the programme in 2020. Of all animal categories presented for slaughter by the programme farmers, Holstein Friesian steers were the most numerous; amounting to 45% of all animal throughout

Number	Age	Carcass weight (kg)	Grade	Carcass fat	€/kg
Holstein Friesian steers					
444	27	325	3.9 (O-)	8 (3=)	3.48
Holstein Friesian bulls					
154	22	320	5.1 (O=)	6 (2+)	3.45
Angus steers					
53	25	320	5.40 (O=/O+)	9 (3+)	3.83
Hereford steers					
42	25	315	5.1 (O=)	9 (3+)	3.69
Angus heifers					
85	24	265	5.2 (O=)	9 (3+)	3.74
Hereford heifers					
63	23	261	5.7 (O=/O+)	11 (4=)	3.77

Changes in Slaughter Performance

The changes in slaughter performance witnessed across the participating farms between 2018 and 2020, encompassing three year's slaughter data, is detailed below. Although prices have yet to recover to 2018 levels, noticeable improvements have been witnessed in on-farm efficiencies in terms of producing animals for slaughter. The age of slaughter and the carcass weights changes produced by early-maturing steers and heifers have been achieved by an increased focus on moving these animals off farm before Christmas of their second year. This figure is expected to improve even further going forward as the additional weights achieved at the weanling stage, along with improvements in health and nutrition, will result in more animals becoming available for slaughter at younger ages. Furthermore, although the age of slaughter of Holstein Friesian steers is comparable to that witnessed in 2018, the carcass weight output per animal has climbed by 23kg.

Number	Age	Carcass weight (kg)	Grade	Carcass fat	€/kg
Early-maturing steers					
2020	25	318	5.3 (O=)	9 (3+)	3.77
2019	26	312	5.4 (O=)	9 (3+)	3.70
2018	28	324	5.5 (O=/O+)	9 (3+)	3.94
Early-maturing heifers					
2020	23	263	5.4 (O=)	10 (4-)	3.75
2019	24	259	5.3 (O=)	10 (4-)	3.72
2018	25	259	5.4 (O=)	9 (3+)	4.11
Holstein Friesian steers					
2020	27	325	3.9 (O-)	8 (3=)	3.48
2019	26	317	4.2 (O-)	9 (3+)	3.43
2018	27	302	4.3 (O-)	8 (3=)	3.77
Holstein Friesian bulls					
2020	22	320	5.1 (O=)	6 (2+)	3.45
2019	21	320	4.6 (O-/O=)	7 (3-)	3.40
2018	22	331	5.1 (O=)	6 (2+)	3.77