Feed Management in a Difficult Spring

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Spring 2018

- Challenging weather!
- Poor growth rates and grazing conditions
- Fodder shortages
- Increased pressure at a very busy time of the year

Forage Supplies

- Assess silage reserves now
- Take measures to stretch silage

How?

- Minimise forage inclusion (9-10kgs (Teagasc) but lower can fed (6-8kg) in practice (with advice!)
- Fodder Stretcher rations
- Increase parlour feeding
- Sell surplus stock
- Forward stores/young bulls – ad lib meal

Milking Cows

- Prioritise milking cows as they reach peak yield
- Avoid digestive problems – acidosis, displaced abomasums by over feeding concentrates (starch)
- Breeding starting in a few weeks – what is the BCS of cows?
- Consider Once A Day (OAD) milking to reduce energy requirements and boost BCS ahead of breeding

Falling Milk Proteins

- Normal dip in milk protein % as cows reach peak

- Problem greater in 2018 - combination of restricted or no access to grass, poor quality silage and in some instances underfeeding of concentrates relative to milk yield

If milk proteins are falling sharply consider the following:

- **Dietary Protein:** A shortage of protein due to little or no grass in the diet means cows cannot make milk protein
- **Grazing conditions:** In poor conditions, grass utilisation declines so increase parlour feeding or offer silage or buffer feed as an additional energy source
- **Ratio of milk fat % to protein %:** Fat % should not exceed 1.4:1 e.g. if milk protein is 3.2% the fat % should not be greater than 4.48% as this can indicate the cows are 'milking off their back'

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Don’t forget the dry cows!

- Silage can be saved with dry cows

- **However** – calf draws on energy reserves of the cow so ensure she has sufficient energy in the diet

- **<u>Examples (with or without straw – Teagasc):</u>**

- 6.5kg DM (30kg as fed), 3kg soya hulls, 1 kg soybean meal
- 4kg DM (18kg as fed), 3.5kg soya hulls, 1.25kg soybean milk, 3.5kg straw

- Adequate feed space critical
- Good dry cows mineral

Fodder Stretcher Rations

- High fibre rations
- Soya hulls, palm kernel, sunflower, pollard, maize gluten
- 15/16% crude protein
- Approximately 1kg will replace 4kg of ration (22% DM)
- Not to replace in parlour feeding but as a top up with silage
- Feed space restrictions need to be considered

Example Milking Cow Diets

- Teagasc: 4-5kg grass by day, 5kg parlour concentrate, and 2.5kg beet pulp plus 5-6kg DM silage at night
- Lyons: Silage ad lib (81% DMD), grass where possible and 8kg parlour concentrate
- Others: 8kg Silage (35kg as fed), 1.5kg as fed straw, high energy in parlour concentrate 7kg, beet pulp (midday on silage) 2.5kg, soybean meal 0.75kg
- Advice for your own situation critical!

Other Stock:

- **Yearling Heifers:** Ensure good plane of nutrition to avoid falling behind growth targets for breeding
- Need to be consuming at least 2.1% of liveweight (6.5+kg DM)
- Grass + 2-3kg of good quality concentrate (0.94UFL and >16% CP)

- Store Cattle & Beef Cattle: Can be increased to ad-lib over a few days. Ideally at least 1.5kg DM should be forage (straw of 5-7kg silage)

What Now?

- **Know farm grass cover** - Farms with a low percentage grazed and good grass covers must get area grazed now, especially where silage stocks are tight.

- **Fertiliser:** The aim is to have 70 Units Nitrogen per acre out by early April.

- Avoid sudden changes in diet

- Blends better option than straights when feeding high levels

Take Home Messages

- Best advice is … to seek advice
- Flexibility is key – quality and quantity of grass/silage available, grazing conditions and grass supply, BCS and milk production
- Avoid sudden diet changes as grass becomes available
- Stay positive!

Thank You