

Newsletter SEPTEMBER 2021



Harvest Update

By Paul Mooney – B.Agr.Sc – Ph: 086 353 2342

Harvest 2021 won't be forgotten for many years! Weather, yield, quality, and price will possibly break all records. With most crops now cut, it's time to think about next year's cropping plan. Good winter crop rotation is crucial for the control of soil borne diseases like take-all. Please discuss your options with us so we can find the crop that best suits you. For those leaving ground fallow until next spring, the benefits of a cover crop cannot be ignored. Many have seen that, even in this year of super yields, cover crops have added at least 0.5t per acre. It costs very little to sow cover crops and the earlier they are sown the better.

Hybrid Rye Update

Hybrid rye has come to the fore in recent years as a potential feed in young stock diets and as a break crop, so we put out some seed last autumn and harvest is now complete. Crops are yielding approx. 3.75 tonne per acre with up to 20 round bales/acre. Input costs are similar to winter oats. Rye doesn't seem to have any major disease issues, but slug pellets are essential after sowing. Rye is best suited to very worn soils and due to the volume of straw, potash applications will need to be much higher than normal. This year we have seen some crops grow to 6ft tall and lodged in parts, so you must maximise the use of growth regulators and keep nitrogen levels to below 80 units/acre.

Maintaining Performance of Beef Stock on Autumn Grass

By Brian Delaney – B.Agr.Sc – Ph: 086 0449592

While we all know grass is the most economic feedstuff, it does have certain limitations that need to be addressed in order to get optimum performance from your beef cattle.

1. Lower Dry Matter: Autumn grass will have an average dry matter content of 15%. This will limit the amount of energy the animal can consume on a daily basis. If a 600 kg animal is supplemented with 4 kg of concentrate, it automatically raises the dry matter content of the grass-based diet to approx. 35%, thereby massively increasing its energy intake. (The animal would have to eat 80 kg of grass without supplementation to get the same level of energy from 30 kg of grass with supplementation.)

2. Lower Energy Content: Autumn grass will have 8% less energy than spring or early summer grass. This might seem a small difference but because animal's maintenance requirements come first, it can have a dramatic effect on performance. A decrease of 8% in energy intake can reduce performance by as much to 30%.

There are other less obvious benefits to feeding at grass.

- a. Supplementation will reduce demand for grass, helping to extend the rotation and build grass covers to help reduce the winter housing period.
- b. Supplementation of young stock has many benefits such as reducing stress at weaning, having a stronger animal at housing and cheaper gain at grass.



Keeping the Focus on Late Lactation Production

By Aisling Claffey – B.Agr.Sc., Ph.D. – Ph: 086 0317483

Managing milk solids at grass has been challenging this summer, with many farms experiencing a substantial amount of secondary heading in paddocks, resulting in crude protein and quality levels in the plant being well below average. In recent weeks, dry matters have reduced, and crude protein levels have increased. This is natural for this time of year, but you must ask, what are the implications of this for maintaining production in late lactation?

For every 1% reduction in the dry matter of grass, dry matter intake is reduced by 0.34 kg. With the changing of the seasons, dry matter intakes on farm have typically been reduced by 1 kg DM/cow/day, and on wet days this can go down by a further 2-3 kg. You may not necessarily see milk yield slipping immediately, however body condition score (BCS) can slacken in this period as a result. While grass may be plentiful at this time, offering small amounts of dry, good quality baled silage on wet days will help to maintain intakes, and deliver a return in terms of milk yield and BCS.

Throughout August, grass crude protein levels have improved. This has resulted in milk urea levels increasing, which means there is a hidden energy

cost on the cow in terms of her having to excrete the excess ammonia from her rumen. So, this can also have a negative impact on milk yield or BCS, particularly when intakes are reduced.

Now is a good time to assess the herd's condition score. As yields drop, it may be worth considering once-a-day milking for thin cows to build BCS, provided of course that the bulk tank and individual SCC are not an issue. Alternatively, when your final scan is completed, you can earmark lower condition animals for increased dry periods. Cows with a BCS of below 2.5 will need a 12-week + dry period with good quality silage (70 DMD+), while cows in the range of 2.5-3.0 will require a 10-week dry period with good quality silage (70 DMD+).

Yield response to concentrate feeding is strong in late lactation, with a response of at least 1 lt milk/kg of concentrate. With an average milk price of 38c/lt being paid by many co-ops in July, it will certainly pay to feed cows up to 5-6 kg of concentrates per day as more seasonal conditions set in. This will ensure yield declines are minimal, and milk constituents and BCS continue to increase steadily this autumn.



Testing for Minerals – Understand Your Options First

By *Shane Gonoude* – B.Agr.Sc., M.Agr.Sc – Ph: 086 646 6707

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We encounter a number of cases or concerns around mineral deficiency in herds and flocks every year. There are several factors to take into consideration when trying to decide how best to determine if there is a deficiency at play.

Grazed grass makes up the greatest proportion of the diet for Irish livestock. Therefore, a herbage mineral analysis from varying parts of the farm, particularly where there is variation in soil types within the farm, is an important resource. Herbage analysis also gives you an important window into the potential antagonistic effects of Sulphur, Molybdenum and Iron on the availability of other nutrients.

Copper

Copper is a challenging mineral to account for accurately. Blood levels are maintained by a process called homeostasis, whereby animals address shortages by pulling from the store of copper in the liver. While a liver biopsy is the gold standard test to identify an animal's pool of copper, it is not the most feasible to achieve on farm. So, while you can test the blood for copper levels, results may not give the true picture. We sometimes use other labs that can assess a greater number of indicators than blood plasma copper levels alone. These other

indicators identify not only potential deficiency, but also the effect thiomolybdates (produced in the rumen from high levels of Molybdenum and Sulphur) are having on inhibiting copper absorption.

Iodine

Whole blood Iodine is the best indicator of Iodine deficiency. It is an expensive test and therefore plasma levels are more commonly used. However, plasma testing only indicates Iodine intakes, as it accounts only for circulating Iodine, as opposed to Iodine availability. Analysis of the milk can also be a useful indicator, as Iodine uptake in the mammary gland is controlled by a similar mechanism to that in the thyroid gland.

Selenium

Selenium is another element, that if interrogated under a number of different methods, such as plasma and selenium-dependent enzymes in the blood, can provide information on both current intake levels as well as the longer-term picture both of which are important determinants of required supplementation levels.

If you have concerns about mineral nutrition, please reach out to your local **J Grennan and Sons** representative, who can work with you, your vet and your herd to maximise performance.

Soil Testing – It Never Made More Sense!

By *Hilda Dooley* – B.Sc. M.Sc. Ph.D. – Ph: 086 6074729

This year has seen an unprecedented rise in the price of all fertilisers, and unlike other years, there is absolutely no sign of those prices coming down anytime soon. Most recently there has been a significant spike in the cost of phosphorus (P) and potash (K). Last spring the cost of a unit of P was approx. €0.85 and the cost of a unit of K was approx. €0.35. While it is impossible to be definitive, it looks like a unit of P will cost you approx. €1.25 next spring and a unit of K will cost you €0.45.

So, it has never made as much sense to do soil testing. A good soil analysis enables you to put out only what you need for optimal crop growth. A basic soil sample for a 10-acre field will cost around €15. If that result allows you to reduce your P application by 10 units per acre, you will save €12.50/acre on P alone.

Soil samples should be re-done every 4-5 years and re-examined at the start of every year. We keep soil records on file, and now is the time to ask us to pull out

those records for you and formulate a fertiliser plan for the coming year. If it's time to re-sample, we can organise that for you as well. We are now offering an additional digital/GPS soil sampling service, in conjunction with a company called Farmteam. They use a quad mounted automated soil sampling system. This service will save you time, ensure an accurate sample is taken and will provide a GPS record of your sampling locations and results.



Driving Performance of Your Weanlings in Advance of Housing

By Joe Naughton - B.Agr.Sc - Ph: 086 1452586

Grassland: Aim to have built up your highest farm cover by mid- September. If using Nitrogen (N), consider applying it in the form of NPK compounds to build P and K levels before the mid-September closing date. This should extend grazing into November. Ideally, calves should be grazed in a rotation system, i.e., moving into fresh covers of 1300-1500 kg/DM/Ha every 3-4 days.

Herding: The next two month is a critical period to maximise thrive before housing, so it is important that health issues do not interfere with performance. Herd your stock every morning, ideally alongside meal feeding. This routine will help to detect possible Pneumonia and other health issues at an early stage.

Meal Supplementation: 1-2 kg per day of our Early Graze Calf Nuts / Super Weanling Crunch (with or without Lungbooster) will support good dry matter intakes and keep calves thriving until housing. (See previous article by Brian Delaney).

Worming and Vaccinations: Weanlings should receive their last wormer before housing in September.

It is best practice to carry out a faecal egg count first. This can be facilitated by your local J Grennan and Sons rep. If Pneumonia has previously been an issue on your farm consult with your vet to identify the right vaccination programme for your stock. It is now also a good time to consider beginning your IBR vaccination programme, in advance of housing.



Target Weights:

It's important to weigh calves and ensure they are achieving target weights. This will allow you to group calves correctly at housing, where lighter stock can be offered the best quality silage available and 1-2 kg meal.

It is important to take into consideration the mature weight of your cows when weighing dairy replacements. For example, calves with a maintenance EBI value of €0 will have a predicted mature weight of 640kg and these calves will have a target weight of 240 kg by October 1st. Calves with a maintenance EBI of €15 will have a predicted weight of 570 kg and these calves should be 200 kg on October 1st.