



## CULTIVATE CHOICE, HARVEST FREEDOM!

Our farmers, the backbone of our nation's food production, deserve the right to make choices that empower them and contribute to a fair and competitive marketplace. Farmers should have the freedom to explore various options when it comes to purchasing goods for their farms. The essence of a thriving agricultural community lies in providing farmers with the flexibility to make decisions based on their unique needs, financial considerations, and the well-being of their businesses.

While cooperatives play a vital role in supporting farmers, it is essential to ensure that the relationships established are built on mutual respect, transparency, and **fairness**. Farmers should not be constrained by exclusive agreements that limit their ability to seek alternative

sources for their agricultural inputs. By fostering an environment that encourages healthy competition, we enable farmers to access quality products at competitive prices, ultimately promoting sustainable and efficient farming practices.

We advocate for a farmer-centric approach that prioritizes their autonomy and freedom to choose suppliers, fostering a marketplace that values diversity and innovation. As we navigate the difficulties of modern agriculture, let us champion a system that empowers our farmers and defends their right to choose their inputs because **farmers right to choose has tremendous value, and they should never lose it.**

## Benefits of letting young light stock out early to grass.

*By Brian Delaney - (B.Agr.Sc) - Ph: 086 044 9592*

As we approach springtime, hopefully improving weather conditions will allow grassland to dry. On beef farms, the focus from now on, should be to assess ground conditions and take advantage of the numerous benefits in getting light stock out early. These include;

**A. BEDDING:** Unless stock is housed on slats, bedding materials such as straw, peat or sawdust will be costing over €1/hd/day. Straw supplies are very tight this year so letting out some stock will help to stretch supplies for calving cows and finishing stock.

**B. FEEDING:** Feed costs for Weanlings on ad-lib silage will on average be over €1.20/hd/day. In comparison, the daily cost for grazed grass will be 50c/hd/day.

**C. WEIGHT GAIN:** For every extra week that cattle are on good quality spring grass, they will be 3kg heavier in liveweight compared to an ad-lib silage diet. This extra weight gain will make a difference by reducing the number of days required to finish. It will also deliver improved carcase weights/kill outs.

**D. BETTER SILAGE:** There is also a great benefit in allowing cattle to graze off residual grass that has built up since last autumn. This will leave a nice clean base for any sward that is to be targeted for silage. This is a key step if you plan to make superior quality silage this year.



# WONDER LAMB MILK REPLACER:

Farmer Testimonial *By Damien Conboy - (B. Agr. Sc.) - Ph: 087 212 4036*



Vincent Connelly, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath runs a mid-season lambing lowland flock of 320 ewes & 80 ewe lambs. The breeding flock is based on predominately Belclare cross ewes with some hill type back breeding to maximise both lamb output per ewe and hybrid vigour at lambing.

Texel rams are the preferred choice to produce terminal lambs, while Belclare rams are used to produce replacements. Vendeen rams are used on the ewe lambs due to ease of lambing and hardiness.

On average the ewe flock scans at approximately 200% while ewe lambs scan at 130-140% year on year. Like any sizeable sheep flock with good prolificacy, surplus and orphan lambs are a part of the system and must be given

consideration to maximise overall lamb output and reduce mortality rates. Triplet bearing ewes are the main contributors to the numbers of lambs artificially reared. Although Vincent tries to cross foster as many as possible, he still finds himself with 60-80 "pet" lambs per year.

Once newborn lambs are given adequate levels of colostrum in the first 24 hours they are trained onto an automatic feeder where they have access to **Grennan's Wonder lamb** milk replacer ad-lib. The feeder mixes out fresh power every time it makes up one litre of milk and this generally fed at 18% concentration. The feeder is set up to feed 4 individual pens of lambs, so lambs can be batched in terms of size and age.

While lambs remain in these pens they have ad-lib access to fresh concentrate feed, water and straw for roughage. Lambs are also bedded daily to maximise comfort and hygiene. Lambs are abruptly weaned once Vincent is happy with the level of concentrate intake. Lambs are usually approx. 7-8 weeks old at weaning but Vincent aims to reduce this by a week in the coming year as lambs perform very well once they were weaned.

## Wonder Lamb MILK REPLACER

Improved Health | Better Weight Gains | Maximum Returns

*"Over the past two seasons I have approx. 140 lambs reared through the auto feeder on Wonder lamb and I'm very happy with the way it's working here. Firstly, it flows well through the machine for mixing which is very important to keep the concentration correct for every feed. Secondly, the lambs are doing very well on it. Lambs take to it quick, intakes are good and I've seen very few cases of digestive upsets and no issues with bloat which is vital to this system as margins are very tight. I certainly won't be changing off this product this season and I would have no hesitation recommending it to other sheep farmers based on what it's doing for my lambs."*



# CROP CHOICE THIS SPRING & SEED AVAILABILITY.

By Paul Mooney - (B.Agr.Sc) - Ph: 086 646 6707

It's time to plan for the cropping year ahead. Land availability and never tightening regulations are big challenges but on a positive note, growing costs are falling. Fertiliser has probably fallen by 30% since this time last year. Chemical prices are also softening a little. Compared to last year, a crop of spring barley will probably cost €70/acre less to grow this year.

**WHAT TO SOW?** The 3 crop rule is still in place so you need to plan around it. Spring barley will be the most popular crop. With good husbandry on good land, many are well capable of achieving over 3tonne per acre. Spring beans will have to be considered. Their rotational benefits are substantial and will deliver at least 0.5tonne/ac extra yield in the subsequent crop. Another big bonus to beans is the protein subsidy of €200/acre. This will happen irrespective of yield or weather, so it is a way of safe-guarding a portion of your income.

**SEED AVAILABILITY:** Seed is always tight because its very costly to produce and no one wants leftover seed the following year. This year, seed supplies are extremely tight and surplus seed will simply not be there. If we are to maintain the same spring barley area as 2023, then there will be a shortfall of at least 3000t of seed. Our usual go to sources i.e the UK & Denmark are in deficit also because they too had a bad harvest in 2023. Therefore it is very important that you order your seed and arrange delivery much earlier this year, ideally before the end of February.



# NEW IMMUNOGLOBULIN TESTING SERVICE

The new ImmunIGY Bovine IgG test can rapidly and reliably demonstrate the level of antibodies (IgG) present in calves' blood up to 42 days of age and thereby assess whether the calf has received sufficient, high-quality colostrum in the first two hours after birth.

The blood sample is taken using a novel, easy to use lancet, so the process is relatively stress free on both the calf and the farmer. Results can be determined within 10 minutes using a combination of lateral flow technology and a specialised interpretation device.



## BENEFITS

- Ideal for checking the immune status of bought in calves.
- Available in all Greennan branches.
- Can be used on calves up to 42 days of age.
- Sample can be tested accurately up to 7 days after being taken.
- Validated against laboratory-based methods, so is highly accurate.
- Requires no special preparation (eg. Centrifugation).

Contact your local Greennans branch/sales representative for further information on the ImmunIGY Bovine IgG test.

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# CALF HOUSING – KEY REQUIREMENTS

By Joe Naughton - (B. Agr. Sc.) – Ph: 086 145 2586

**WHAT DOES THE CALF REQUIRE?** A Warm, Dry, Well ventilated, Clean, Spacious and Bright house.

**A WARM HOUSE** The thermal comfort zone for a calf younger than 4 weeks lies between 15 and 21 degrees celsius. Older calves thrive at temperatures between 0 and 21 degrees celsius. When temperatures are lower than 10 degrees, a calf jacket should be provided for the 1st month of the calf's life and a heat lamp should be provided for the first few days of life. An extra 100grams of milk replacer powder per calf per day when temperatures are below 10 degrees celsius is also very beneficial. Calves wearing calf jackets require less energy for maintenance, grow better and have a reduced risk of diarrhea and lung problems.

**DRY BEDDING** For the first 4 months of life all calves should be in straw bedded housing. Young calves spend 80% of their time lying down, so the type, depth and dryness of the bedding is very important. Trials show that calves on dry comfortable bedding perform better, gaining at least 70 g extra per head per day vs calves on damp bedding.

Nesting score is also important. Straw should be at least 15cm deep and should remain dry at all times. Check this by using the kneel test. Aim for a nesting score of 3. This means calves legs aren't visible when they lie down. Concrete floors should have a drainage slope of 1:20 towards a channel. Clean out bedding every 1-2 weeks and bed with fresh straw daily.

**GOOD VENTILATION** Check ventilation in calf pens by crouching down to calf level. If there is a smell of ammonia, it is not well ventilated. There should be a continuous, slow (ideal air speed 0.15-0.3mts/second), stream of fresh air, overhead in all calf houses. This will remove excess moisture, effluent gases (such as ammonia) and airborne microbes, all of which can combine to cause outbreaks of pneumonia. In this country, natural ventilation in calf houses is provided by a combination of the wind and the stack effect. It is the most efficient and

least expensive ventilation method. Roof opening dimensions is the most important part of any natural ventilation system and should be assessed carefully in every calf house.

A lot of Irish calf houses could benefit from a Positive Pressure Tube Ventilation (PPTV) system. This ensures fresh air is delivered at calf height all over the shed in a draught free manner. PPTV systems entail a long tube that runs along the internal length of a calf building with an external fan pulling in fresh air and distributing it via a series of holes along the tube's entire length.

**HYGIENE** Consistently high standards of milk feeder hygiene is absolutely vital. Best results obtained using hot water and Peracetic acid.

Rinse all buckets with warm water (32-38 degrees) to remove excess milk. Soak in a warm (55 degrees) solution of water + detergent for 30 minutes. Scrub with a brush to remove any biofilms and rinse again with warm water. Allow to drip dry.

In the case of automatic feeders, wash and disinfect teats daily with Milton solution to reduce the spread of disease.

**ADEQUATE SPACE** Allow  $\geq 1.5$  m<sup>2</sup>/calf. This is the minimum legal requirement.

A space of  $\geq 2$  m<sup>2</sup>/calf is associated with increased odds of 'safe' coliform levels in bedding, increased lying times and increased calf ADG. A space allowance of  $\geq 3$  m<sup>2</sup>/calf is associated with much reduced respiratory diseases.

Always group calves by age and size and keep calves in groups of 12 or less. Don't allow calves to share air space with older cattle

**ADEQUATE LIGHT** Clear lights in at least 10% of the calf house roof area is highly beneficial. It's also important to have light over automatic feed stations and meal troughs because it encourages calves to get up and feed during the night.

