

## Management of cows going to the bull

The management of cows from calving to conception is crucial for maintaining a compact calving period. Producers should aim for a calving period of less than 12 weeks and then aim to increase the number of cows calving early in the season (e.g. target 65 per cent calving in the first three weeks). A compact calving period optimises the use of spring grass and will make nearly every element of managing the herd easier. This is because when cows are at a similar stage of their production cycle, they and their calves can be managed in bigger, more uniform batches.



### The importance of nutrition

Body condition and nutrition after calving are key determinants of fertility and how quickly a cow will get back in calf. Every effort should be made to minimise, and if possible avoid, body condition loss between cows calving and getting back in calf. To achieve this the best grazing should be prioritised for the breeding herd, in particular for younger and thinner cows.

Research has shown that cows calving in moderate body condition start cycling one to two weeks sooner after calving compared to thin cows. For cows that calve in a less than ideal body condition (lower than BCS 2.5), fertility can be improved by providing high levels of nutrition immediately after calving.

The nutrient demands of early lactation can almost double the energy requirements of a suckler cow compared to when she is dry. Milk yield peaks at around six weeks after calving, which coincides with the breeding season, so access to good quality grazing needs to be planned for cows and heifers being put to the bull. A plentiful supply of high-quality grass is particularly important for heifers with their first calf at foot to ensure they get back in calf and keep growing.

Good grazing is key to keeping the costs of production down as grass is generally the cheapest feed available. In terms of grass growth, producers should aim for sward heights of 8-10cm in continuously stocked fields and be prepared to move cattle to new grazing if quality or quantity starts to decline.

As well as planning nutrition for the breeding season, producers should ensure that all breeding cattle have been vaccinated according to the herd health plan. Any cows that required assistance at calving should be checked by a vet and treated within 3-5 days of calving to optimise future fertility.

### Don't forget the bull

In the eight weeks before joining cows, the stock bull should be supplemented with 2-3kg of high fibre and 14 per cent crude protein. This supplementation may need to be continued when they are working to try and maintain body condition.

Take a look at the BRP [Feeding suckler cows and calves for Better Returns manual](#) for more information