

Teagasc beef research open day

Teagasc is the Irish body that provides integrated research, advisory and training services to the Irish agricultural and food industries. At a recent open day held at their beef research centre in Grange, Co. Meath, updates were given on ongoing research projects, which all aim to improve on-farm productivity through the implementation of profitable technologies.

Attendees learnt about the BETTER (Business, Environment and Technology through Teaching, Extension and Research) farm beef programme, which was established in 2009. The aim of this initiative was to improve the productivity and profitability of beef farming in Ireland through the project's focus farms.

Teagasc beef advisers described how heightened grass production and subsequent effective grazing management has hugely influenced the 53% increase in gross margins that was seen across focus farms. Average grass growth for the Teagasc beef BETTER farms in 2015 was 10.3 tonnes (t) dry matter (DM) per ha. Compared to the UK average of 7.9 t DM per ha, there is capacity to increase grass production levels and subsequently increase farm productivity in England.

Grassland management and sward utilisation proved a fundamental part of the profitable technologies

demonstrated at the open day. Figures show that pastures comprising of a lower proportion of perennial ryegrass varieties are costing up to €300/ha (£254/ha) per year in terms of reduced DM yields and decreased inorganic fertiliser use efficiencies. Where sown species make up less than 50% of the sward, it may be a suitable time to invest in a re-seed. Teagasc estimate that it costs approximately €700/ha (£580/ha) to re-seed. This means that the increased profitability gained through re-seeding a pasture would cover the cost in just over two years. This shows that re-seeding is one of the most cost-effective on-farm investments.

Emphasis was also placed on the management of the grazing platform. It is important to remember that planning for early spring grass starts in autumn, when producers begin 'shutting up' paddocks. By implementing a rotational grazing system, it is possible to increase sward production levels by 70% and increase utilisation to 56% compared to a set stocking system.

It is important to walk the grazing platform on a weekly basis in order to measure grass growth and to assess grass covers. This is a crucial part of effective grassland management as it allows producers to form a feed budget while also optimising utilisation and maintaining quality within the sward. Producers are advised to be proactive in terms of grassland management rather than reactive, which could prove costly for the business.



The Teagasc beef event is held every second year at the Grange research centre, which is 45 minutes from Dublin airport. For more information visit teagasc.ie