

## CIEL Feed and Forage meeting

AHDB has been closely linked to CIEL (Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock) since its formation in 2016. CIEL is aiming to coordinate leading global livestock production and product quality research. It provides a gateway to world-class research institutes with industry-guided expertise, providing British farmers with sound research-based evidence. A meeting was held at The Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) in late February, where various industry experts and members of the CIEL collaboration updated attendees of the ongoing research on feed and forage.

With increasing demand and competition from Asian markets, organic protein prices are set to fluctuate in the coming years. China currently consumes 25% of the world's soya bean production and, as their national herd increases, so too will competition and the price of imported soya bean. Trade tariffs between the UK and other nations in a post-Brexit era were also mentioned, with Robbin Irvine from the Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association estimating a 30 – 50% increase in import tariffs. Home-grown grass and forage crops could prove a key asset to offset this.

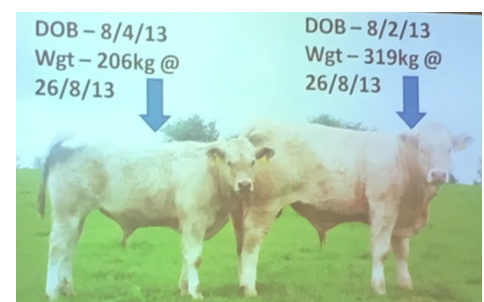
Research shows improved grass varieties are comprised of about 16 – 25% protein, but this tends to fluctuate depending on weather conditions, plant growth stage and crop husbandry. Grass costs around 7p per kg of dry matter (DM) and concentrates can cost more than four times this amount. Despite this, figures show that average grass utilisation in the UK is at 4.1 tonnes DM/ha. The top grassland farmers in the UK are capable of growing and utilising in excess of 12 tonnes of DM/ha, so there is huge potential for improvement.

The audience also learned of the need to improve ruminant performance from grass and forage. Mark Young from CIEL talked about the extensive research he is coordinating that will focus on improving both feed efficiencies and animal growth. The poultry sector has focused on maximising efficiencies over the last few years and this has led to a cheap, lean source of protein for both domestic and foreign markets. Chicken remains the biggest threat to beef and lamb. It is hoped that this research package within CIEL will ensure beef and lamb producers can remain competitive in the marketplace.

The final speaker of the day was Justin McCarthy, editor and chief executive of the Irish Farmers Journal. He focused on the four Ps: planning, production, performance and price. Farmers are entirely in control of the production and performance of the farm business through effective planning. It is key to get the basics right and Mr McCarthy noted the need for regular soil testing on farm. Research has shown as much as a 12% reduction in grass yields where soil pH is not at the optimum level of 6 – 6.5. Now could be a suitable time to carry out a soil test and apply lime, if needed.

Grass is the cheapest feed source available to farmers. Calving and lambing should be planned to coincide with the natural grass growth cycle. The aim of this is to increase liveweight gain from grass and reduce the need for supplementary feeding later. Mr McCarthy demonstrated that a difference of two months between calving on a Teagasc monitor farm cost £226. The younger animal cost £226 more to finish later in life when estimating 1kg live weight costs £2

If farmers plan for optimal production and performance, they are less susceptible to price fluctuations.



Source: Irish Farmers Journal