A Season with Cattle — Getting Ready for Winter

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Feeding Suckler Cows

One of the main issues you'll encounter during winter feeding is forage variability, both in quality and quantity. One of the main elements to consider is dry matter.

Why Does Dry Matter Matter?

Dry matter (DM) excludes water content. Nutritive value (energy, protein etc.) is in the DM not in the water. This is the element that is most likely to vary each year.

Estimating DM%

- Liquid easily squeezed out by hand <20%DM
- Liquid squeezed out but takes more effort 20–25%DM
- Very hard to get any liquid out but hands feel wet>25% DM
- Can you form a ball with it, how does it hold its shape?
- How spikey is it in your hand – rougher it is the lower the energy

Year to year, or even field to field, variations can have a large impact on how much silage you need to feed. For example, if a cow needs 10kg of silage dry matter, for wetter silages this could be up to 48kg of silage fresh weight. For a drier silage, it could be as little as 16kg fresh weight.

Hay is also Variable

- ME 7.5 – 9.2 MJ/kgDM
- CP 6-10% DM
- Hay cut from an older, mature ley will have a lower nutritive value
- Well preserved doesn't necessarily mean high nutritional value

Example Rations

Based on a 600kg outwintered spring calving suckler, 8 weeks pre-calving in good condition

	Poor Silage (9ME)	Average Silage (10ME)	Good Silage (11 ME)
Silage (kg)	25	28	28
Beef nut (16% CP) (kg)	2	-	-
Straw (kg)	-	-	1

Feeding Draff

Distillers/ Brewers extract the starch from the grain for alcohol production. Water extraction takes out other solubles (minerals, trace elements, vitamins), draff is what's left. It is a useful feed but can go off quickly if not in a pit/sheeted. Oil content can limit its use, care has to be taken not to use too much. 2-3 kg/ 100kg liveweight can be fed a day – sucklers generally 10 -15kg/head. Must provide mineral supplement

Rations Using Draff

Example based on outwintered 600kg dry Suckler, with draff at 23% DM, 11 ME and 20% CP

	Poor Silage (9ME)	Average Silage (10ME)	Good Silage (11 ME)
Silage (kg)	21	20	18
Draff (kg)	10	8	8
Minerals (kg)	0.15	0.15	0.15

Minerals and Vitamins

- Provide dry cows with min/vit supplement around 4-6 weeks pre calving
- Deficiencies can lead to health issues for both cow and calf, such as retained placenta, slow calving, milk fever
- Magnesium: approx. 1-2 weeks pre calving provide 100g of beef cow mineral containing 10% Mg
- Iodine: Not stored in the body, must be supplied
- Selenium: Low levels can lead to poor muscle tone leading to calving difficulty
- Vitamin E, works with Se, does not cross placenta so calves rely on good supply from co-lostrum

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Options for Mineral Supplements

Blocks/Licks
- Labour saving & prevent bullying at trough
- High energy buckets provide 2-3 MJ extra

Bolus
- Only cover trace elements
- Longer Acting (months)

Drench
- Broad range
- Usually contain trace elements and vitamins
- Cheaper than a bolus but shorter acting (weeks)

Mineral Premix
- Ensures every animal is getting mins/vits through the mix
- Best option for indoor feeding

Mineralised Roll/Blends
- Read the label on recommended feeding levels

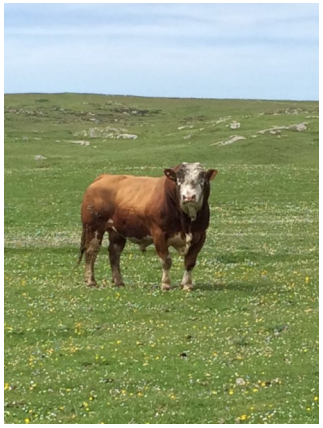
Looking After Bulls

- Correct worm/fluke dose after grazing periods
- When bulls come back in, they need to be fed well as a lot of condition lost
- Young Bulls need to be on a growing ration-if not it can impact on longevity and capability
- Bulls that have lost a lot of weight then 12ME will NOT do
- Need 12.5 to 13ME energy nut and 2 feeds per day

Example rations			
Weight (kg)	**Daily gain (kg)**	**Silage (kg)**	**Nuts (kg)**
700	0.40	42	1.5
800	0.45	47	1.75
900	0.50	51	2.25
1000	0.55	55	2.5

Bull Wintering

- If housed inside ideally have him where he can see other cattle
- If housed, ensure you have a ‘safety’ area in the pen to ensure you can get away from him if need be
- If outwintered –shelter and adequate feed to keep condition on



Before Use in the Spring

- Bull must be allowed exercise prior to being used
- Pre-season bull examination by vet
- Feed him well pre turnout to cows –vital for young bulls
- Young Bulls should not be overworked, use with 10 to 20 cows

Replacement Heifers

- Aim for good growth, 0.85-1kg/day
- Calving age –dependant on ability to 'look after' the newly calved heifers
- Sourcing heifers –health scheme / acclimatised to your system / area
- Retain own heifers?

Cattle Health Issues

Outwintered cattle in the Highlands and Islands tend to suffer from few health issues. Two of the main issues that you are likely to see are fluke and abortions.

Fluke

Fluke is likely to be an issue with outwintered cattle. The life cycle involves a snail host that favours wet ground and mild temperatures. Disease is seen in cattle from mid-winter onwards. It tends to be impractical to fence off wet areas, so cattle need to be treated. A treatment plan for the specific challenges you have on your croft/farm should be developed with your vet.

Fluke Treatment Options Include

- Injectables (Closantel, Clorsulon)
- Pour-on (Closantel, Triclabendazole)
- Drench (Triclabendazole, Albendazole, Oxyclozanide)

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Depending on the life stage of the fluke, different products are require

Development Stage	Drug
Immature fluke (2 weeks)	**Triclabendazole** (e.g., Fasinex 240, Tribex 10%)
Immature fluke (6 weeks)	**Triclabendazole, Closantel** (e.g., Closamectin)
Adult fluke	**Triclabendazole, Closantel, Oxyclozanide** (e.g., Zanil, Levafas Diamond), **Albendazole** (e.g., Endospec, Albex), **Clorsulon** (e.g., Bimectin Plus, Ivomec Super)

Many will have used Trodax in the past to control fluke. The manufacturer of this product has ceased production, so it will no longer be available.

Abortions

Investigate cases where you find fetus and/ or placenta. At the very least, this will establish if it is an infection that you could be taking action to reduce. The chart to the right shows causes of abortion that have been determined at our vet labs.