



Take-home messages from visits to Down and Antrim

In mid-January, our Technical Sales Team travelled to County Down to visit a dairy farm and a beef farm as part of our technical training. We were also fortunate to visit the dairy and calf rearing facility at Greenmount Agricultural in County Antrim.

Technical training involved visits to both dairy and beef farms.



A simple solution - a purpose built rack for drying and storing milk buckets in the calf shed

Key Findings...

- Silage quality for dairy cows and finishing beef cattle was excellent (minimum of 75% DMD) and the host farmers identified this as a fundamental cornerstone to the profitability of their systems and being able to sustain periods of low farm gate prices.
- As was mentioned during our visit: "If targeting silage quality over bulk it might cost a few more bob to make a ton of good silage over bulky, poorer quality silage but poor-quality silage costs a lot more overall as there is waste at feeding out and then take the hit on performance. We have seen a difference of up to 5 litres of milk/day with the dairy herd when feeding a better silage!"

- Incidence of milk fever is extremely low on farms and very few herds are using calcium boluses. This is because the farms are specifically targeting silage for different animal groups and also feeding Magnesium Chloride to dry cows for the last two weeks before calving. The dry cow silage is low in potash and receives no slurry or compound fertiliser.
- Lameness in dairy herds was identified as an issue and it takes management. The inclusion of Biotin and Protected Zinc is standard in the dairy minerals and the host farms reported seeing a benefit from rubber mats in the collecting yard as it reduced the 'wear and tear' on the hoof of the cows. The cows go through a foot wash (just clean water) after every milking and twice per week the cows go through a footbath after the foot wash. Hoof pairing is done monthly.
- At Greenmount College all of the calves have calf jackets and are housed in the new and novel 'Igloos' in groups of 10 to 15 calves.

SPRING 2024 SPECIAL OFFER

Bulk: For a minimum delivery of three tons there will be a discount on the order of €50 per order

Bags: For a minimum order of one full pallet (56 Bags) there will be two free bags of Ultra Calf Feed





Managing Grass & Forage this Spring

This spring many farms are starting off with very high grass covers and we are hopeful for some favourable weather to allow for good grazing conditions.

Walk your farm and calculate how much grass you actually have starting off and target what stock you will get out to grass first. Livestock farms need to have a flexible plan for grazing and there are a number of influencing factors which affect this.

Weather is a critical factor. Don't sacrifice animal performance or paddocks if the weather is against you, this will only slow down your next grazing rotation.

Soil Type - cold soils will take longer to reach the grass growth required to support herd demand, so think of your own farm when deciding on a grazing strategy.

Budget grass and silage weekly in February. Some farms may have low fodder reserves so review stocks on your farm frequently. Once grass is in the diet work your grass budget to try and keep it in the diet, getting dairy cows out for just three to four hours is enough to get the benefits of grass.

How much to feed and what to feed?

Concentrate feeding levels should not be set in stone but reactive to increasing herd demand, weather, your overall forage budget and yield potential. Table 1 outlines recommended feed levels depending on forage available and milk yield. A common mistake is to over-estimate grass dry matter intakes so be realistic.

February is a month when weather conditions can change quickly so we recommend having a feed in the dairy bin that allows for flexibility in silage/grass levels. Transition cows to grass slowly and we recommend that cows should be calved five days before being turned out to grass.

Table 1: Recommended concentrate supplementation depending on forage type and supply

Forage 68% DMD Silage	What Dairy Cube to feed	Milk Yield		
		22 Litres	26 Litres	30 Litres
Indoors fulltime on 68% DMD Silage	Milkwell 18	7.0 Kgs	8.0 Kgs	9.0 Kgs
	Milk Max 18			
Grass by day (6kg DM) Adlib 68 % DMD silage by night	Milkwell/Milk Max 18	6.0 Kgs	7.0 Kgs	8.0 Kgs
	PIP Spring/Ultra Dairy 16			

This table gives an approximate guideline. For detailed recommendations, contact your local Ruminant Support Specialist



Wishing Tom Maher well on his Retirement

On Friday, January 26th, we held a Retirement celebration for Tom Maher of Tullaroan, who served Brett Brothers loyally for 41 years. In 1983, Tom began working as a lorry driver and during his early career with the Brett family, Tom delivered bagged feed and even hauled cattle from marts. An early riser, Tom was bound for the ports in his lorry before the sun was up to bring the raw materials back to Callan. Tom was always a diligent and dependable driver and during the harvest he worked long hours to keep drawing in the grain. We wish Tom a long and healthy retirement.



Liam Brett pictured with Tom Maher on Tom's last day in Brett's following 41 years of service.

FEBRUARY PHOTO COMPETITION



We are looking for the best photo that depicts Spring on your farm. The winner shall receive a One for All Voucher and the chosen photo will appear in our 2025 Calendar. To enter our photo competition, please email your entry to photos@brettbrothers.ie

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