

# March Agronomy Update

## NEWS

- DAFM have agreed not to penalise patchy crops under BISS payments.
- DAFM have applied for a derogation in the 3-crop rule.

## WEATHER

With rainfall of over 100mm already recorded this year, compounded by a wet end to 2023, the challenge to get work completed is as difficult as ever. This persistent rain has left fields completely saturated, not only preventing growers from catching up on missed winter cereal plantings but is also impacting on the spring sowing period.

## CROP WALKING

The importance of continuous, detailed assessment of crops on a field-to-field basis is vital. Plant counts are a key tool in determining the potential yield of each crop. Despite the temptation to re-sow patchy areas of winter cereals, this should be approached with caution and should only be considered as a last resort. There are significant economic implications associated with re-sowing to consider, such as the ability of the lower yield potential spring cereal crops to carry the establishment costs associated with the removed crop.

When assessing your crops, especially those that appear thin or patchy, consider a strategic approach to fertiliser application. A 20% reduction in application rates of N, P and K may

prove to be more cost-effective for these specific conditions. Always evaluate each crop's needs to make informed decisions. This ensures we drive growth and tillers for optimum recovery, while also considering overall economic input efficiency.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF ROOTS

Given the weather we've had since sowing, root systems in general are in poor condition due to waterlogged soils. Poor roots systems result in poor fertiliser utilisation, and can lead to root diseases like Eyespot and Take All if or when we experience dry periods. To increase root mass an application of a foliar P fertiliser should be included early, along with your normal trace element application practises. Doing this helps the plant drive root mass, aiding tiller survival and ultimately helps to increase and maintain yield.

## WINTER BARLEY

Uniformity is key for crops this spring, a plant count of 150-250 plants/m<sup>2</sup> in winter barley is a perfectly viable crop. It is advised to get the first split of Nitrogen onto barley as soon as possible, to drive growth and encourage tillering. An early application of 40 units of nitrogen

can be enough to kickstart the crop in early March. It is recommended to follow this with the main split before GS32 (Second node detectable). Winter barley is sensitive to stress, so be cautious with early applications of Plant Growth Regulators (PGR). These should only be considered when the temperature is above 8 degrees and ideally before the crop reaches GS 30. PGRs can help reduce the apical dominance, encouraging the plant to develop stronger roots and more tillers.

Weed control is a priority for winter barley. While the application to control certain grassweeds such as annual meadow grass has passed, there's still an opportunity to tackle weeds such as chickweed, cleavers, poppies, and other broadleaved varieties. Effective herbicide application now can help ensure a cleaner crop and reduce competition for resources.



Drummonds trial plot emerging

## WINTER WHEAT

Winter wheat has a great ability to make up for lost time and conditions—it's a crop that can compensate. Achieving an even spread of plants is just as important for wheat as it is for barley. Aim for a plant count of 90-200

plants/m<sup>2</sup> to produce viable yields. Getting nitrogen on your winter wheat early is key to pushing your plants forward and maximising tiller numbers. The nitrogen applications can be divided into three parts: ¼ ; ½ ; ¼. Where there is a risk of take-all or on second wheats, higher initial N application rates as soon as possible is advisable.

Don't delay with herbicide applications. As soon as the weather and soil conditions allow, apply herbicides to control weeds. Timely applications are crucial to prevent weed competition to ensure a productive growing environment. Making the most of the early spring window for these treatments can make a significant difference to the success of your crop. Field history is crucial when making the correct herbicide choice, especially where no Autumn application has taken place.

### PHOSPHATE & POTASH

It is vitally important to ensure you have in date soil test results. Soil tests are required every 4ha (10ac). Without a soil test, it is assumed that the soil is at Index 4 for Phosphorus (P), and as a result, no Phosphorus allowance will be made for that area. Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) applications should be carefully considered to replace crop nutrient offtakes. This approach ensures that soil fertility is maintained at optimal levels for the growth and health of your crops.

Adhering to these guidelines not only supports sustainable farming practices by maintaining soil health but also ensures optimum yields and quality by ensuring that your crops have the necessary nutrients available. Always consult with your Drummonds Agronomist for specific advice and recommendations tailored to your farm's conditions and crop varieties.

Winter cereal	10t/ha	7.5t/ha
P offtake	38 kg/ha	28 kg/ha
K offtake	98 kg/ha	74kg/ha

Teagasc 2024

### WINTER OILSEED RAPE

Evaluating the Green Area Index (GAI) of your oilseed rape after winter is crucial for optimal crop management. GAI measures the amount of green leaf area compared to the area of ground it covers. If your crop has a large and dense canopy, you might be able to reduce the amount of nitrogen (N) fertiliser needed. For crops with a GAI less than 0.8 or covering less than 50% of the ground, using a PGR can help develop a more uniform canopy and increase the leaf area, which is key for enhancing the number of seeds per square metre and, consequently, the potential yield.

You can start applying Growth Regulators at the beginning of stem extension and continue up to the yellow bud stage. This helps in shaping the crop's canopy for better sunlight penetration and air circulation, which are essential for healthy growth.

An early application of fungicides is critical for controlling diseases such as Light Leaf Spot and Phoma Stem Canker, which can significantly impact crop health and yield. It's particularly important to act quickly against Light Leaf Spot, treating it as soon as you notice the first signs to prevent widespread damage.

Crop description	Total N
GAI < 1.0	225kg/ha
GAI 1.0	210kg/ha
GAI 1.5	190kg/ha
GAI 2.0	130kg/ha

Teagasc 2024



Phoma in oilseed rape

### SPRING BEANS

The best time to plant spring beans is from early March to the first week of April. For spring-sown beans, aim for a density of 25-35 plants/m<sup>2</sup> (depending on Thousand Grain Weight (TGW)). They have the potential to be very profitable through availing of the protein payment scheme. Key factors like seeding rate, plant spacing, and the TGW are critical to consider for a successful bean crop, with early planting preferred. Soil conditions play a significant role in the outcome of bean cultivation; for instance, data from the PGRO highlights that soil compaction can lead to yield losses of up to 40%.



Spring beans emerging

It's important to incorporate P & K into the seedbed when planting beans. Drummonds Agriphos is an excellent source of P & K, providing nutrients that are immediately available to the plants. This not only helps with root development and soil structure but also boosts microbial activity in the soil. Agriphos also contains trace elements like calcium and magnesium, which are beneficial for nutrient uptake and improving soil quality.

Pre-emergence weed control is crucial in bean crops as there are not many post-emergence spray options. Be mindful of your rotation, where oilseed rape is included the herbicide Emerger can be used to help control volunteer rape in bean crops. It is recommended that beans are grown no more than once in a 5-year rotation.

## SPRING CEREALS

For spring-sown cereals, it is crucial to give your crops a strong start. Incorporate 1/3 of the crop's N requirement into the seedbed. This early boost of nitrogen is essential for getting the crops off to a vigorous start. Always consider the TGW and do not hesitate to reach out to your Drummonds Agronomist for advice on specific varieties. Remember, the success of spring cereals heavily depends on the condition of the ground at the time of sowing.

Nitrogen is the cornerstone for achieving high yields, feeding tillers, and promoting the development of green leaf area.

Drummonds N-Rich Liquid Nitrogen is an excellent option to consider while planning your nitrogen applications. N-Rich is a blend of 24 N and 3 S which provides flexibility, accuracy, and efficiency of application. It can be applied under various weather conditions and across greater spreading widths.



Drummonds trial site in June 2023

### REMINDERS

- Have you registered on the Fertiliser database?
- Do you have in date soil sample results?
- Know your seeding rates before sowing.
- Ensure your fertiliser spreaders are properly set up and calibrated.

# Calf Rearing Advice

The first 12 weeks of a calf's life are critical and will essentially determine the quality and performance of the animal that will be produced. Farmers should aim to feed, or purchase calves that have been fed 3- 4 litres of colostrum within the first 3 hours of their life. Colostrum feeding is the only way to transfer antibodies to a calf.



Calves that do not get enough antibodies after birth will have failed passive transfer (FPT) of antibodies. Calves that suffer FPT are at a significantly higher risk of illness and death and those that survive illness have reduced growth rates subsequently. Optimising nutrition and minimising morbidity is essential to ensure the calf has the best possible chance of achieving its full genetic potential for growth and feed conversion efficiency. This 12-week calf rearing stage can essentially be split into 3 phases as explained by Teagasc:

**Phase 1:** 0-4 weeks. The calf depends on a liquid diet of milk or milk replacer and has the necessary digestive enzymes to utilise their nutrients (proteins, fat and carbohydrates) effectively. Ration should be introduced from 3 days to help to stimulate rumen development.

**Phase 2:** 4-8 weeks. The calf is developing rumen functions and part of its daily feed will be solids. The calf's daily intake of concentrates will depend on the amount of liquid milk or milk replacer fed daily and also the

palatability and digestibility of the concentrates offered.

**Phase 3:** 8 weeks onwards. From eight weeks of age, the calf can effectively utilise dry food and no longer depends on a liquid diet. It is vital that the calf is consuming enough concentrates before it is weaned off a liquid diet (1kg per day before being weaned).

### Key targets for dairy/beef calves

Minimal mortality - <5%

Minimal Morbidity – any setbacks will reduce daily intake and average daily gain. Low morbidity will also reduce vet costs.

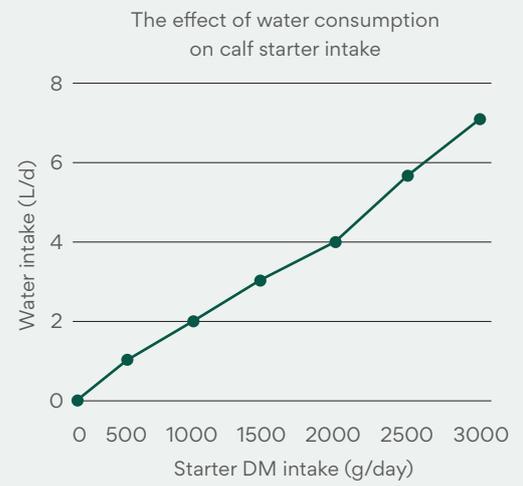
Optimal Daily liveweight Gain – target 700 – 800 grams per day up to 15 weeks

Drummonds supply high quality calf rations such as Calf 18 (18% protein toasted ration), Ultra Calf (18% protein) or Calf Follow On (17% protein).

## Water & Fibre in a calf diet

- Clean fresh water should be made available to calves at all times. Water goes directly into the rumen and creates an ideal environment for fermentation by rumen bacteria. It is the fermentation of grains that leads to rumen development.
- Research shows that calves with free access to water eat more starter concentrates and have enhanced rumen development.
- Calves offered water eat 30-60% more dry feed.

- Calves achieve 31% higher Average Daily Gain from 0 – 10 weeks of age.
- Fibre is very important in a calf's diet as it promotes the growth of the muscular layer of the rumen and helps maintain the health of the rumen lining through its abrasive effect (preventing papillae clumping together).
- In general, fibre/roughage may be introduced by day 3 and should be available to all calves by 2 weeks of age.
- Fibre quality is very important for calf performance. Poor quality fibre creates fill effect, especially if its stemmy and indigestible to calves.



# March Offers

Ends 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 2024



NOW  
**€895**  
inc. VAT

Condons Delux Dehorning Crate



NOW  
**€49.50**  
inc. VAT

2.0mm Tornado Titan Barb Wire 200m



BUY 10  
GET 1  
**FREE**

Peach Teat Pull Through/Screw in



NOW  
**€32**  
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NOW  
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Milkshake 7.5kg



NOW  
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Green Plastic Wheelbarrow 100L



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