

Fodder crisis: the vets' perspective

Brian Ryan, Mulcair Vets, Co Limerick

Cappamore Show is an important date in our local calendar. In 2017 the heavens opened the evening before, but the day was saved by the industriousness and belligerence of the local show committee. It has been raining since and these same farmers are now showing the same resourcefulness in dealing with the current fodder crisis. Despite rapidly diminishing stocks, farmers have adapted through feeding fodder beet, straw, soya hulls and whatever they can get their hands on. The area within our practice contains a

lot of marginal land, with owners budgeting for a late turnout annually. These farmers are not as badly affected as our large dairy farmers who were banking on an early spring. I hope all farmers continue to show the same generosity of spirit in this crisis as our local committee did last August.

Frank Clerkin, Clerkin Vets, Co Cavan

The winter/spring of 2013 lives long in the memory of Cavan farmers, so they have been more cautious with stocking levels since. We didn't experience the same dairy expansion as was seen in other parts

of the country. Many farmers save enough fodder for an expected turnout date on 1 May. There are those who have been buying for some time now and this week has been the starting point for many to source bales. There is plenty of fodder moving on the roads, but this is at a high price. Therefore, while fodder stocks are running dangerously low, we are not experiencing the same degree of hardship as can be seen in southern counties, but we need the grass to grow now.

Conor Kilcoyne, Tubbercurry Vets, Co Sligo

We have zero grass here while

land is getting wetter by the day. Turnout in difficult years here can often run to May bank holiday, but in 2013 it ran into June. We may be looking at a repeat of that this year. Silage quality has been good, but typically there is only one to two weeks' supply left on most farms. Unprecedented high levels of fluke infestation and poor dosing strategies haven't helped matters, particularly in the sheep flock.

Jerry Crowley, Glenbower Vets, Cork & Waterford

In east Cork and west Waterford the winter continues. I estimate 20% of clients are out

of fodder, 20% have enough and the remainder are getting tight, with 10 days or so feed left. The length of winter is now gone over six months, with Ophelia at one end and Emma in more recent weeks leaving unforgettable imprints in the locality. Pressure on farmers, their animals, housing and slurry storage is at the most severe I've seen in 27 years of practice. Maintaining adequate fibre from forage in ruminant diets is critical to animal health.

Brian, Frank, Conor and Jerry are members of the XLVets group of practices.