

Vets' views of the drought around the country

Frank Clerkin, Cavan

Grass in Cavan and Monaghan is very scarce, with many farms feeding recently-made hay to supplement the little that is available in the fields.

Lower-stocked holdings are under less immediate pressure. However, those with large herds are finding it tougher. Ground that was harvested is at a standstill and second-cut fields are doing nothing.

Many herds with high stocking densities are considering reducing numbers after the long winter and this extreme dry spell with such radiant burning heat.

Many tanks have not been emptied on second-cut ground. The moisture isn't there to allow it to fertilise.

Cattle grazing are content, but only holding their own and require supplementary feeding to achieve thrive.

It's the busiest July on record for anyone running a feed mill business.

Padraig Harris, Wexford

The drought has been particularly tough in Wexford and the outlook is even worse. Grass is non-existent. Crops of beet, barley and potatoes have died off in places, so the fodder crisis will continue.

Everyone is feeding dairy cows. Some are zero-grazing their silage ground, some have them on a TMR at 40% the level of feed they would get if fully housed, while most are feeding some first-cut silage with 6kg to 8kg of meal.

Average estimated cost is €3 per cow per day. Water is a problem, with wells drying up as they can't handle the volume of water required.

We've seen a few cows with heat stress, but more commonly we're seeing problems that relate to variation in diet and the availability of water, such as rumen impaction and vitamin B1 deficiency.

Conor Kilcoyne, Sligo

No crisis (yet) in south Sligo. Folklore has it that the Moy once dried up in the 1800s, but this is certainly the driest summer in living memory.

Veterinary-wise, the remarkable weather hasn't precipitated any major issues to date.

We have seen very little lungworm this year, but we are warning our clients to be vigilant for coughing after we get some rain.

The ideal time to dose would be 10 to 14 days after some rain arrives.

Ticks also seem to be drought-prone, as there is little red water around, but the dry pastures are leading to a lot of scald in lambs.

Farmers are reluctant to admit they want rain in these parts, but it would be welcome at this stage.

Brian Ryan, Limerick

2018 has been an extremely difficult year for farmers and the current drought is continuing that trend.

I wrote about the fodder crisis in this column 13 weeks ago and now I fear we are heading towards an even bigger problem.

Many of our clients are, and have been, supplementing meagre grass supplies with first-cut hay or silage.

They are grazing the second-cut meadows and have increased meal feeding to cows. Some of our low-lying farms are faring better and the hope is that when the rain comes, this ground may grow sufficient silage to replenish stores.

Farmers showed great fortitude in facing the last fodder crisis and hopefully they will also get through this one.

Jerry Crowley, Cork

In a normal year (if such a thing exists), most farmers can relax somewhat at this time of year. The spring rush is receding into memory, large portions of winter forage is in yards, breeding is winding down and managing the farm is relatively straightforward.

Around here, it was 10 June before a lot of herds turned the corner after an eight-month winter. The extra work and expense of feeding animals is a huge mental and physical strain on the farming community. Winter feed budgets are more important than ever to survive the latest curveball. Mother Nature has thrown our way.

Frank, Padraig, Conor, Brian and Jerry are members of XLVets, a group of practices working to achieve a better future for agriculture and veterinary. See www.xlvets.ie for more.