

Feeding livestock to meet your best needs

There are many factors to take into consideration before planning feeding plans for your livestock. Many of these outcomes will differ from your neighbour, but that's normal and what is "best" for one farmer can be the complete opposite for another. So before deciding feeding plans, decide what you have on farm, what shed space you have for housing, what labour is available and often most importantly make sure you know what the end consumer wants! If you sell stock through a live ring or dead to butchers different considerations must be made for what is demanded by them, to achieve the maximum return for your investment.

Without subsidies *your* plans make or break the bank so consult some experts and have a plan before buying any stock or housing current stock. Grass and, in the winter, silage is the most economical feed and most readily available on most farms to be fed. However feeding cattle on this exclusively *will* grow and finish cattle, but very slowly. There is nothing wrong with this, however trials conducted by the SAC will show a combination of forage (silage/straw/hay) *and concentrate* gives the best return for your input. Finding the balance to meet your system is where the real money is made. Intensive feeding of stock will finish stock faster, however if your end buyer is looking for a large animal of 750-1000kg live weight, you will not easily achieve this by feeding cattle on ad-lib concentrates from an early age. However if you are buying stores and concentrating on *finishing* cattle, with turnover of numbers being important to you, then an intensive system will suit. Either way, making good use of home-grown feeds will give you the greatest return for your investment before buying in additional feed. However a fine balance is needed with regards protein, starch and fibre for optimum performance, so take time to consult with your feed specialist to see what options and supplements are available to you before deciding on a system. You must know what type and size of carcass your buyer wants, before you decide on your system – *and* the type of cattle you should buy!

Realistic daily live weight gains can vary from 0kg-2kg+ per day depending on age, breed and diet. What is more important than feed cost and feed conversion is the cost per unit return, i.e. the cost per Kg of live weight gain in beef production. Remember without any live weight gain the cost per unit return on your feed is very expensive. Take time to work this out to achieve the optimum return.

Summary

Feeding systems can be as complicated as you want, or they can be simple, effective, manageable and above all profitable. Take time out and analyse what has been done in past years and discuss with feed experts what can be done in the future to improve your system.

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