

Graze calves off? Only with care

Last month, I wrote about the problems we were having at the Stratford Demonstration Farm, in locating suitable grazing over the summer/autumn period for our replacement calves.

I said the essential criteria for grazing off weaned calves was that the grazing should be of such quality that it would grow the calves continuously and well. If we could not find grazing to meet these criteria we would keep the calves at home – likely spending the money saved, on buying in feed for them.

However, I reported that we had finally located grazing that appeared to be quite capable of providing both the quantity and quality of feed we were looking for – albeit certainly at the top end of the current grazing market price for summer grazing, if



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not above it. The assumptions around the adequacy of the grazing then proved to be somewhat premature – so much so that we terminated the agreement at the end of January and brought the calves home.

Basically, they were not reaching their target liveweight gains and, more importantly, this was proving to be an ongoing process in that every week they were falling further behind. The consequence was that ultimately there would need to be some fairly expensive feeding added on to bring them

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back to target.

Obviously the longer this went on, the more difficult and costly it would be to catch up, and the greater the possibility that this would, in fact, not be achievable.

Feed adequate

The diagnosis of what went wrong is simple. The problem was not, as would be thought, the quantity and quantity of feed available. As we had assessed, these were quite adequate. What was not adequate, which could not

have been predicted, was the management of the calves.

It became apparent that the calves were merely being grazed, rather than managed. In fact, “grazed” is probably too kind a word, and merely parked on the farm would be a better description. The major problem was the calves were just not being shifted when they should be, and representations from our manager failed to produce the necessary response.

Obviously, there would be considerable costs, both actual and opportunity cost, for our

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