



Weighing: A missed opportunity

Weighing is often a missed opportunity on farms, some might call it a painful job, but it comes with a wealth of benefits. It's essential for tracking growth and performance rates in your herd. Keeping an eye on target weights allows for you to adapt feed rates or can highlight underlying health conditions. It's a simple and cheap way to track performance. For responsible anthelmintic treatment, knowing correct weights for correct treatment rates is vital.

It's unrealistic to expect farms to weigh once a week, but picking out key moments in the calf's life can give you important data. Try to weigh animals whenever they are handled, but key example times would be;

Dairy/ Dairy Calf to Beef	Suckler Calf
At Birth	At Birth
12 weeks (weaning) or at turnout	Pre turnout or 12 weeks
Mid-season grazing	Mid-season Grazing
Pre-housing	Pre-housing

*Growth Rate depends on cattle breed but averages at 0.8kg ADG

If there are drops in average daily gain (ADG) and a nutritional problem is ruled out, an underlying health issue could be the problem. Using routine faecal egg counts along with your consistent weighing allows for better treatment decisions. Individually tracking weights and FEC's allows for Targeted Selective Treatment where specific problem calves are treated leaving the rest of the group untreated. This avoids blanket treatment which accelerates anthelmintic resistance.

This is also useful in refugia maintenance i.e leaving a portion of animals untreated and therefore a proportion of susceptible untreated worms end up on the pasture. These susceptible worms help to dilute out any existing resistant genetics in the worm population.

If you are unable to weight each animal individually, group animals of a similar size and weigh the heaviest animals. Dose then according to this animal's weight for the whole group to avoid underdosing, rather than using the average weight of the group. If there a lot of variation in the group, it would be better to weight them individually and dose accordingly.

Keep records of the animal ID, their weights and the date. Many mobile phone farming apps now make this very easy and will calculate the ADG for you. Alternatively, a computer spreadsheet can do the same job. Failing that, a recording weights in a book is better than not recording at all and trying to remember if animals are on track to reach their targets.



As regards to anthelmintic use, without using accurate weights you're running the risk of underdosing. Underdosing is a quick way to accelerate anthelmintic resistance. When animals receive less than the recommended dose, the strongest parasites may still survive, reproduce, and pass on drug-resistant genes to the next generate.

Which means by underdosing you are wasting your time, labour and money as well as causing more problems on your farm over the long term.

