



### **New Diseases**

If you can determine disease problems on the seller's farm you can then decide what vaccines to use when the animals have been purchased. This information will not be available if animals are purchased through a market or from a dealer. Animals may be purchased that look totally healthy, but can be carriers of certain diseases, for example, enzootic abortion of ewes, Salmonella, Staphylococcus mastitis, footrot or Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD). If you are pre-warned that these may be a problem then you may be able to vaccinate against them, or at least be on the lookout for them.

### **Old diseases**

Even if all the old stock have gone, and the houses and pasture are rested, some of the diseases that they had can still hang around for years, even after disinfection. Typical examples include Orf and Blackleg. This means that you will still have to vaccinate against these diseases. Again your local veterinary practitioner will be able to advise you what is best for your enterprise.

### **Testing stock prior to purchase**

In some cases it may be advantageous to test stock prior to purchase. The buyer should be aware that not all diseases may be detected on a blood sample, and that tests can be expensive. It may not be economical to test for all diseases, but checking for certain disease may be cost effective, for example, those that cause abortion or infertility. These questions can only be answered on an individual basis depending on the farm enterprise and purchase policy. Your local veterinary practitioner will be able to answer specific questions.

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## **Alternatives to farming**

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The most obvious way to supplement farm income is to take part-time employment off-farm. Many farmers in North Antrim have already done this, with over 50% farmers farming part-time. The second and less considered way is farm diversification.

Farm diversification is a way of branching out from traditional farming and taking on a new enterprise. Diversification is not for everyone, but with the right idea and the support of those around you, it may at least be worth considering. Before starting a new business enterprise you should be satisfied that there is a market for the new product or service - the idea should be well researched and planned.

Many people see barriers that would prevent them from considering diversification but these could possibly be overcome with retraining and business support.

### **Where do I get an idea?**

An idea might come from a thought you have had for some time or often a hobby or skill. It may be adding value to an agricultural product or may be something unrelated to agriculture.

### **Developing your idea**

Diversification is not quick and easy but there is help available. Many organisations offer start-up guidance and support. As a first step, DARD Rural Enterprise Advisers based in Ballymoney and Ballymena can help you explore the idea and identify possible funding sources through the forthcoming Rural Development Programme.

Your DARD Rural Enterprise Advisers are:

Gerry Burns 028 2766 0111  
(covering Moyle District Council area)

Claire O'Rawe 028 2566 2823  
(covering Ballymena and Larne District Council areas)

The DARD farm diversification website also provides valuable information ([www.greenmount.ac.uk](http://www.greenmount.ac.uk))

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## **Grants and Subsidies information**

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### **IACS**

If you have submitted an IACS application for the year 2001 you can, if necessary, add additional land which has not been previously claimed in 2001. If you wish to do so you need to tell DARD in writing the farm survey number and field number of the area you wish to add by 30 June 2001.

### **Suckler Cow Premium Scheme (SCPS)**

SCPS will open for applications on 1 July 2001 and claims should be submitted by 6 December 2001. Producers are normally required to use 90% of their quota or face having it withdrawn permanently without compensation. Where the consequences of Foot and Mouth mean it is not possible for you to claim on a sufficient number of animals or lease out sufficient quota to meet the usage rules, you should apply for exceptional circumstances. DARD will be as flexible as possible in these circumstances.

### **Sheep Annual Premium (SAP)**

The claim date for 2002 SAP has still to be decided but should fall within December 2001.

### **Beef Special Premium (BSP)**

Claims for BSP can be submitted in the usual way.

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## **Is Organic farming an option?**

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### *Why consider organic farming?*

Having been destocked you are in a unique position to consider starting to farm organically. Organic production, however, is not simply low-input farming. It requires top quality management and a lot of dedication.

The conversion of land to achieve organic status generally takes two years and usually starts from the time an application is made to an organic sector body. The destocked time can contribute towards the conversion period of the land. Silage made during this time could be fed to your stock next winter. Clover swards are the key to successful organic production and reseedling could be tackled more quickly without the pressure of grazing stock on the farm. When the time comes to restock, fewer animals would be required for an organic system compared to conventional systems. Replacement breeding stock do not have to be organic, although purchase of organic stock would shorten the time until sale of first organic finished stock. The time scale for simultaneous conversion of beef and sheep is two years.

### *Financial assistance?*

Government offers financial assistance to farmers converting to organic production through the Organic Farming Scheme. Payments are made over a five-year period with total payments of £450/ha for land registered for arable aid or in permanent crops (horticultural), £350/ha for improved land or £50/ha for unimproved land. Other payments such as livestock premia, Environmentally Sensitive Area or Countryside Management Scheme payments can still be claimed.

### *Where do I get more information?*

If you would like more information about organic farming please contact the Organic Development Advisers based at Greenmount College:

Livestock, (Dairying )	David Alexander 028 9442 6614
Livestock, (Beef and Sheep)	Charlotte Moore 028 9442 6752
Horticulture and Crops	Adrian Saunders 028 9442 6765

They can provide you with more details about the requirements for organic production, consider the viability of the organic option for your farm, assist with conversion plans and making applications to organic sector bodies and for the Organic Farming Scheme. They also co-ordinate training courses and organic beef and sheep, milk and horticulture development groups.

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## **Purchasing replacement suckler stock**

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The overall objective for the suckler herd should be to produce a high quality suckled calf efficiently to satisfy the demands of the beef finisher and the market place.

### **Breed type**

Choose a breed which suits your farm situation. In most situations cows with 50% continental genes and adequate milk supply would be a suitable choice. In more exposed situations or where an 'easy care' herd is the aim, consideration should be given to traditional breeds. Go for breed consistency within the herd as this improves ease of management in terms of cow condition and calving interval. Consider future replacement plans before purchasing suckler cows. This is an appropriate time to purchase suitable breeding stock which could be bred from in the future in to obtain replacement heifers. Cows should have adequate milk potential along with good conformation. Now is the time to carefully consider your suckler breeding and replacements plans for the future.

### **Quality**

Sucklers should be of high quality and ideally should be at least an 'R' grade in conformation. Holstein influence in the suckler herds has been partly responsible for poor grades in finished cattle. Farmers should avoid purchasing stock bred from Holstein cows if possible. Most bulls used in suckler herds are 'U' grades and to ensure a crop of quality calves, suckler cows should be at least grade 'R'.

### **Health status**

There are disease risks involved in purchasing breeding stock. The two main risks are Brucellosis and T.B. It is important to purchase from only a few known sources. It is well worth while finding out about the health status of the herds from which you purchase stock.

### **Age of replacement stock**

The decision to purchase heifers or cows will depend on how many animals each farmer intends to claim SCP for 2001. Purchasing heifers as opposed to cows could reduce the potential disease risk and also provides the opportunity to manage your new herd to suit your own management and calving time. In reality, restocking may mean purchasing a combination of both heifers and first calvers in order to have suckled calves for sale during the next year. Quotas will be protected for this year and farmers will also have the option of leasing out quota for this year.

### **Ease of calving**

Ease of calving is an important consideration for the part-time farmer. Saler cross suckler cows have a wide pelvic area and tend to be much easier calved. Generally, the more Holstein genes within a breed cross, the more difficult the calving.

The choice of suckler cow influences the 'quality' of suckled calf produced and farmers should take this opportunity to source quality breeding stock.

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## **Reseeding**

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Silage fields that have been continuously cut over the past seven or eight years (or longer) are generally ideal 'candidates' for reseeding. These swards, particularly if the crops are heavy, commonly end up with a low perennial ryegrass content and a high percentage of weed grasses.

Grazing swards that are slow to start growing in the Spring, and are producing disappointing yields of grass should also be considered.

### **Selecting a seeds mixture**

The following points should be considered when selecting a seeds mixture:

1. Intended use – grazing or cutting
2. Anticipated cutting date for silage swards – use varieties that have similar heading dates
3. Requirement for early grazing/expected turnout date
4. Land type, for example, heavy, light etc. and altitude may also be considered

Your Agricultural Development Adviser can help you to select a suitable seeds mixture.

### **Soil analysis**

Deficiencies in lime, phosphate or potash should be corrected before sowing - carry out a soil analysis. Phosphate is particularly important for the establishment of new seedlings while Nitrogen

promotes tillering of the sward. Perennial ryegrass and white clover require a soil pH of at least 6.0 for successful establishment.

### **Method**

Ploughing is the most common method of reseeding - other methods include strip seeding using a direct drill, or minimum cultivation techniques, including power-harrowing and the relatively new Einbock system (a large number of tines create the tilth).

The old sward should be desiccated using Glyphosate, particularly if it contains a large proportion of troublesome weed grasses such as creeping bent or Yorkshire fog.

Minimum cultivation techniques, including direct drilling, work best after a silage cut as there is no dense matt of old grass to interfere with the establishment of the new sward.

### **Timing**

Early-mid August is an ideal time to reseed. Reseeding later than this may lead to poor clover establishment. It also provides an opportunity to lightly graze the area during October. This avoids lush growth being carried over the winter period which can result in winter kill, and a reduction in tillering next Spring. Excess cover in the Autumn and early-Spring will also affect the young clover plants.

### **Improve Management**

Reseeding grassland is not cheap. A direct reseed can cost in excess of £400/ha (£162/acre) where all cultivation work is carried out by a contractor. Identify the reasons for the deterioration of the original sward, for example, late and/or heavy silage cuts, excessive poaching, lax grazing management and poor fertility.

Try and make sure that mistakes of the past are not repeated, so that the new sward remains highly productive.

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## **Re-stocking your farm – Financial Considerations**

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Most of those farm businesses depopulated as a result of Foot and Mouth will be considering restocking within the next few months. Apart from the obvious questions such as "Should I buy springing heifers, maiden heifers or mature breeding stock?" farmers need to consider the working capital required to purchase feed, fertiliser



