



AHI BULLETIN

Gutworms

There are approximately 20 species of worms, known collectively as gutworms, which live in the intestines and stomach of cattle. The two most economically important species of worms in Ireland are *Cooperia oncophora* and *Ostertagia ostertagi*

These worms cause the condition known as parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE), which is very common in cattle. Young animals (particularly calves) may develop severe clinical infections that result in a reduced feed intake, diarrhoea and rapid loss of condition. PGE can also present sub-clinically (without obvious signs) and production losses associated with sub-clinical PGE can include: reduced growth rates, lower feed conversion efficiency, later onset of puberty, poor conception rates and reduced milk yield.

Farmers are generally well aware of the potential losses that gutworms may cause and by this point in the grazing season. A monitoring and control programme for young cattle should have been put in place by now, taking into consideration this year's weather and grazing conditions. Dairy calves in their first grazing season and beef calves after weaning are the two groups of calves at greatest risk from gutworms.

Monitoring can include:

- Regular weighing
- Faecal egg counts

Control programmes for gutworms can include grazing management strategies to reduce the exposure of vulnerable cattle to gutworms and anthelmintic treatments where necessary.

At this time of year many farmers will be considering treating young stock for gutworms and may move these cattle to silage after-grass. Cattle will not have grazed silage ground for a number of months and it will have a lower parasite burden that paddocks grazed since spring time. However, it should be noted that research in sheep has now shown that treatment with an anthelmintic and immediate movement to clean pasture increases the risk of anthelmintic resistance. There are a number of measures that can be considered to reduce the selection for resistance in dose-and-

move systems, for example, leaving a proportion of the better-doing animals untreated. Such options need to be considered on a farm-by-farm basis and should be discussed with the farms veterinary practitioner.

[\[Click here\]](#) for more information on parasite control from the Animal Health Ireland website.

Parasite Control leaflet series



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Cattle Gutworms - the facts



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