

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 19th February 2021

Make sure to get cows out grazing at the first opportunity!

Every opportunity to get grass into the cows' diet needs to be taken, despite the weather challenges that present at this time of year. Getting the cows out on grass is better for the cows, and is beneficial for the grass plant. Nutritionally, spring grazed grass is far superior to grass silage indoors with digestibility in the mid-eighties in terms of DMD. So the more of it you can get into the diet the better.

There are three daily objectives for cows grazing in wet weather:

1. Feed the cow
2. Minimise damage
3. Grazing Residuals (if possible)

The only way for you to know if a paddock is fit for grazing, is to walk your farm. Grazing decisions cannot be made in the farmyard.

To get started:

- 1) Walk the farm and assess ground conditions and grass covers in each paddock. (Record on PastureBase).
- 2) Identify the driest paddocks with a lower cover (800-1000KgDM/Ha) on your farm. The target is to have these grazed in February.
- 3) Get cows out for 2-3 hours on these paddocks after each milking (strip graze/ back-fence, temporary roadways).
- 4) On/off grazing is ideal for getting grass into the cows' diet.

Cows need a keen appetite for grazing; therefore they cannot be full of silage going out to grass. One way to achieve this is to milk earlier in the evening. Start the evening milking at 3-4pm to allow for a second grazing session.

Cows can achieve 90% of their daily grass intake in 2-3 hours after each milking compared to cows out full-time.

- 1) Graze the dry, best infrastructure paddocks with lighter grass covers. Good grazing infrastructure will help to reduce damage and achieve more grazing.
- 2) Aim to have multiple access points in the paddock.
- 3) When weather improves, graze the heavier covers. (Target these after the 30% grazing target has been achieved).
- 4) Use the back-fence to protect areas grazed in poor conditions.

Meeting Grazing targets:

A spring grass budget and spring rotation planner should be completed on PastureBase or other grazing software. The grass budget then will allow you to plan to have enough grass into the second rotation. (Do not let AFC drop below 500KgDM/ha). The planner is designed to take the guess work out of grazing management and it relies on the principle of grazing a set area each day.

- 1) Graze 1% of the farm every day during February
- 2) Target paddocks with the lowest covers initially, in order to reach 30% target
- 3) It's not possible to put cows out on grass, and keep them out, unless there is grass on the farm and there is a grazing plan put in place.

- 4) If 30% grazed in February is not achievable, get as close to it as you possibly can, and focus on the next target of 65-70% grazed by 17th March.

Rewards are high for grazing in February!

Aim to get as close to these targets as possible as every extra day a cow is out on grass, it is worth €2.70/day/cow.

Nitrogen is essential; 1Kg Nitrogen applied = 10Kg Grass DM in Spring.

To get the best response to N in Spring, the soil temperature needs to be 5°C and rising (at 10cm depth). Pay particular attention to the weather forecast, soil conditions and grass cover in the paddock, prior to applying Nitrogen fertiliser (N). Fertiliser or slurry must never be spread on water logged, snow covered or frozen soils.

To check soil temperature in your area you can look up <https://soiltemp.remotesignals.ie/> or buy a soil thermometer. Do not apply fertiliser if heavy rain is forecast or if rain is forecast within the next 48 hours. Be aware that you need to maintain a 2-meter buffer zone (no fertiliser N applied) from any watercourse.

The following paddocks need to be prioritised for early N application:

- Recently reseeded paddocks
- Paddocks with good perennial ryegrass content
- Paddocks with good soil fertility
- Grass covers over 400KG DM/Ha
- Warmer/drier ground

The rate of fertiliser will depend on your farm stocking rate and demand for grass. The target for an intensive dairy farm is to have 70 units N/acre applied by the 1st April if weather and soil conditions allow. This can be achieved with chemical fertiliser, or a combination of chemical fertiliser and slurry. This is generally broken down into 23 units N/acre in late January to February, followed by 46 units of N/acre around the 1st week of March.

Slurry should replace chemical N on a portion of the farm's paddocks.

Splash plate slurry spreading will supply 6 units N/1000gal. Using LESS will increase N content.

Trailing shoe or dribble-bar slurry spreading will bring about an increase to 9 units N/1000 gallons.

- LESS slurry spreading makes better value of the N. Spreading 2500 gallons/acre of LESS slurry will contribute 23units N. This is the same type of N as chemical fertiliser. 23 units N/acre is sufficient N for the level of grass grown from mid-January to March 1st. (To help reduce the usage of chemical N on your farm, use LESS)
- The remaining 46 units N/acre can be applied as chemical fertiliser to achieve the 70 units N/acre by April 1st.
- Aim to use protected Urea because it is less prone to water losses than CAN.

If there is a need for Phosphors or Potassium on your farm, apply compounds like 18-6-12 from mid to late march, when soil temperatures are > 10°C (check your nitrates allowances).

Cows need to be on a rising plane of nutrition, to minimise BCS loss in early lactation.

The level of meal is influenced by the amount of grass and quality of silage in the cows' diet. Recommendations for feeding levels for dairy cows, shown in the table below:

	70DMD Silage		
	Out Full-Time	Out 3-6 Hours	Indoors Full Time
Ration Kg	3	4-5	6-7
Ration Protein %	14%	16%	18%

Calf Care

As the calving season begins it is important not to forget the 1 - 2 - 3 colostrum feeding recommendations:

1. The calf's first feed should be colostrum

2. The calf should be fed the colostrum within 2 hours of birth
3. The calf should be fed at least 3 litres/(8.5% of bodyweight) of colostrum within the first 2 hours

Advisor Profile: Nigel Kennington is a Business and Technology Dairy advisor based in the Teagasc Advisory Office in Kilkenny.

Teagasc Kilkenny Waterford will host a Dairy Webinar on Milk Recording on Wednesday 17th February @ 11am.

Speakers:

Richard O'Brien - Teagasc

John Maguire - Teagasc

Stephen Connolly – Progressive Genetics

To register follow this link <http://bit.ly/3pB6x53>

