

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 21st August 2020

Moving Focus to Autumn Grassland Management

The focus on Drystock farms in August changes to, Firstly increase the number of days at grass and subsequently increase the level of animal performance from grass and Secondly set the farm up during the final rotation to grow grass over the winter months and as a result providing grass on farm for the following spring.

Autumn Targets

It is well understood at this stage that grass is the cheapest feed at approximately 7 cent per kg dry matter (DM). When coming into the autumn months it is critical to ensure a high proportion of the animals diet comes from grazed grass in an attempt to ensure that feed costs are kept to a minimum. To ensure that Drystock Farms have a sufficient supply of grass there are a number of management practices that need to be adhered too.

Building Grass Covers

From mid-August this is the time where we look to extend the rotation length in order to build to a peak at the end of September. It is the grass grown during this period that is available to feed to stock outdoors until the end of November depending on the level of rainfall and subsequent ground conditions.

In order to build grass covers on farm we need to take advantage of good growth in August and September. In order to reduce demand on Drystock farms during this autumn period we must ensure that the stocking rate is reduced allowing the daily demand for grass to be less than the daily grass growth rate. In the majority of cases this is largely done by bringing all ground used for silage making predominately back into the grazing rotation. On more heavily stocked Drystock farms the daily demand may be reduced by introducing meal feeding to animals destined for slaughter or those approaching weaning from their suckler dams. It is important to note while building grass that pre-grazing covers should not exceed 2200 kg DM/ha at peak in mid-late September. The table below is a simple guide to extending the rotation length and days ahead, subsequently building grass covers on farm;

Management Using Rotation Length

Date	1 st August	Mid-August	1 st September	Mid – September	1 st October
Rotation Length (Days)	20	25	30	35	40
Days Ahead	12	18	24	30	25

Closing paddocks

It is important to implement a definite plan to close paddocks from the middle of October. On highly stocked farms the closing of paddocks may commence a week earlier than this and on lower stocked farms a week later. It is important to note that the grass grown in mid-October is potentially the grass that the animals will be grazing next spring from turnout in early to mid-February. You must refrain from grazing these paddocks that have been closed even if good weather conditions are experienced in November as from this period onwards growth rate will fall dramatically resulting in insufficient

grass being available for early turnout in the spring. Keep in mind that spring grass high in digestibility and is more valuable to cattle in the spring.

Late season Nitrogen

Nitrogen will be the key driver of grass growth over the coming days and weeks as soils wet up and we aim to build grass covers. Every effort should be made on Drystock farms to apply nitrogen where required sooner rather than later. As we move from August to September the response to applied nitrogen fertiliser will decline. Studies have shown that the nitrogen cost of growing a kg of grass DM in August and early September is approximately 3 to 5 cent per kilo. However grass grown from nitrogen applied in late September costs approximately 10 cent per kg. Highlighting that earlier applied nitrogen results in greater grass grown & more efficient use of each kg of nitrogen applied.

