

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 30th July 2021

Grassland

Growth rates are variable on farms because of the hot drying conditions and a variation in soil moisture deficits (SMDs) depending on the type of land. The recent high temperatures and drying conditions will dry out soils and lead to a decline in growth rates. PastureBase grass data is showing that a lot of farms have paddocks at the same stage ready for grazing. If this is the case, drier farms should identify 2-3 poorer quality paddocks to skip for now to keep quality grass in front of cows and other stock. Do not bale these skipped paddocks if you are experiencing drought conditions. These can be grazed next week if necessary or removed as surplus bales if rain is forecast. Where declining growth is anticipated hold Cover/LU up to 240 kg DM/LU. Above this means some paddocks will be around 2,500 kg DM/ha at grazing, these are better off removed now as bales, ready for autumn build up in August. On heavier soils where growth remains strong, keep pre-grazing yields to 1,400 Kg DM/ha and cover/ LU at 160-180 Kg DM/LU or 12-14 days ahead.

As always, walk the farm weekly to monitor growth rates (every 5 days where growth is high). Avoid topping/pre-mowing when entering drought conditions, this will only slow down regrowth. Delay fertiliser applications until rain is forecast, and check livestock to ensure they have water and shade.

Beef

The Newford suckler herd (81 cows) in Teagasc Athenry have just completed their breeding season which started on the 21st of April. All cows were artificially inseminated until the 30th of June. Ninety three per cent of the herd presented for AI in the first 3 weeks with 57 cows holding to first service. The once-a-day AI rule was used on the farm where by cows were inseminated at midday each day. Two teaser bulls were used to detect cows in standing heat and this was critical to the success of detecting cows in heat successfully. To really get and handle on how cattle are performing at grass, they have to be weighed on a regular basis. The beef bullocks in Athenry were weighed on the 17th of June and the heifers were weighed on the 9th of June. The summary of their performance to-date is shown in the following table. The beef heifers will be weighed again next week and the first of these 17 month old heifers will be drafted off grass for slaughter without receiving any concentrate supplementation towards the end of July.

Commercial Dairy Farming without Fertiliser N

Dr. James Humphreys of Teagasc presented his findings from Solohead dairy research farm in relation to farming with lower levels of fertiliser N on the Signpost webinar series. Fertiliser N accounts for 19% of GHGs emitted from dairy farms. The use of clover, low emission slurry spreading (LESS) and protected urea on high (280 kg N/ha) fertiliser N systems can reduce GHG by 16% versus the national average. Dr. Humphrey's current research is to investigate to what extent can dairy farms go beyond this reduction. Establishment of grass-clover swards is a primary focus to benefit from biological nitrogen fixation (BNF). In 2020, Solohead used 110 Kg N/ha which supported a stocking rate of 2.4 LU/ha. This is a 28% reduction in GHG emissions. It is important to highlight that the trend to lower N increases net margins, but there are many challenges that must be overcome to be successful. The SignPost webinar can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wz-0K9UKI>

Farm Safety

Last week was farm safety week and it is vital for all farmers to be continually conscious of farm safety and the potential dangers with livestock and machinery as well as other potential hazards on the farm. Young children are on holiday ad around the farm and care must be taken to educate and protect them. The elderly are also very high risk with both machinery and livestock. Protect yourself and your loved ones. Think Safety.

