

## Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday February 1<sup>st</sup>.

### Early Spring Grass

The 1<sup>st</sup> Early Grass Walk of the year for Teagasc took place on the dairy farm of John Raggett, Stoneyford last week. John is one of the best grassland farmers in the country and the event didn't disappoint. John had plenty of grass on the farm with an average farm cover of 1,400 kg DM / ha. Despite that, John has spread fertiliser on the whole farm, light and heavy covers, setting the farm up for the 1<sup>st</sup> rotation but more importantly the 2<sup>nd</sup> rotation. He will start grazing on the 1<sup>st</sup> February, grazing full-time if weather conditions will allow and cutting out silage and cutting back on meal to ensure he gets 40% grazed by the 1<sup>st</sup> March. John has a high stocking rate and very compact calving, resulting in a big demand for feed earlier than most, so he needs the grass. Two key pieces of advice from John re early grazing – its vital to clean out paddocks and limit damage. When the cows are grazing by night at this time of the year, the gap is left open to give the cows access to the sheds.



John Maher, Grass10 Programme Manager; John Raggett, Host Farmer, John Kilboyle, Dairy Adviser

The main theme of the walk was setting up the farm for the year ahead i.e. getting the whole farm grazed by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and getting fertiliser out. Surprisingly, a big proportion of the audience didn't have fertiliser out, despite the ideal conditions for spreading fertiliser. The advice was very clear from the walk – get fertiliser out now spreading 23 units of urea per acre. We know from PastureBase records that on average only 20% of the milking platform is typically grazed in the month of February. The target for dry free draining farms is that 30% should be grazed by the end of the February (for obvious reasons on wetter farms this target should be achieved approximately 2 weeks later). From the experience of the monitor farms in the Teagasc Glanbia Joint programme achieving a target of 30% grazed is important but that achieving 15% grazed by February 15<sup>th</sup> is critical in ensuring that a sufficient number of days have elapsed (approx. 60 days) between first grazing and the start of the second rotation in early April. To achieve this target, the first paddocks grazed will invariably include mostly covers of between 600-800 kg DM/ha in order to get the required area when cow numbers and intake are low. If silage ground is available in the first round, graze it after grazing 50% of the area available for the 2<sup>nd</sup> round. In addition this early grazing target won't be achieved without early compact calving of the dairy herd. The type of cow is complementary to achieving the early grazing target as well.

### **Get ahead of yourself**

Invariably during the first 60 days of the grazing season (between early February and early April) there will be periods of both dry weather when grazing conditions are favourable and wet weather when grazing conditions are poor. It is important to seize the opportunities presented by dry weather

to graze ahead of target. Invariably cows will need to be housed even by night and slow down grazing progress during wet weather in spring as well.

#### Key Messages from the Walk

1. Get fertiliser out now
2. Put a plan in place to get your farm grazed by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April. Be brave and turn out stock. What's the worst that can happen?

*“When the weather is good, go hard at grazing. There will always be the wet days when you will have to be flexible and house animals for a while.”*

#### Upcoming Event

Grass10 Early Spring Grazing Walk on the beef farm of Tim Drea, Danesfort Rd, Bennettsbridge R95 Y584 at 11am on Friday the 1st of February. All welcome

#### Planning for a Successful Lambing

For the majority of mid-season lambing flocks, the scanning of ewes has already been completed or is fast approaching. Scanning of your ewe flock is one of the most important management tools that a farmer can use to plan for the forthcoming lambing season. It gives the farmer an idea of what's coming in terms of lambs per ewe, thus allowing for a more tailored feeding regime so as to ensure that the lambing season will be as successful as possible.

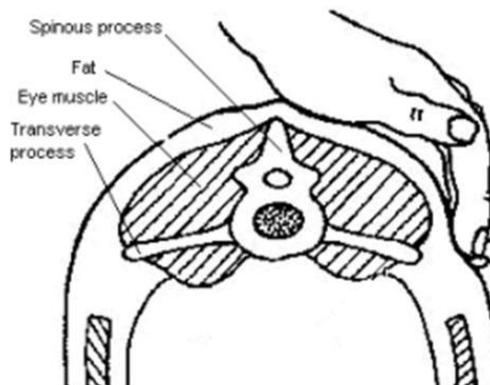
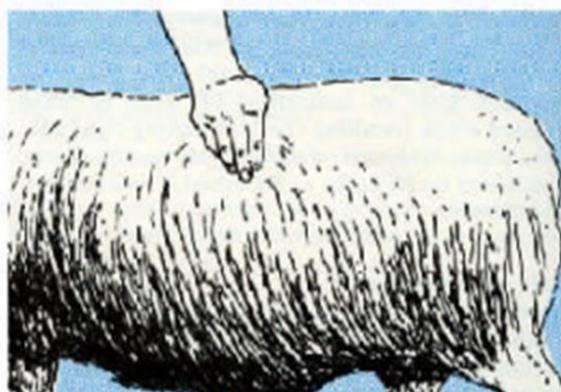
At scanning time, we can also body condition score our ewes and this along with the results from scanning allows the farmer to plan their feeding regime to match the ewe's requirements for the weeks coming up to lambing. They then can be grouped and fed according to litter size and body condition. Body condition scoring is a method of evaluating the body fat reserves in animals. It measures the level of subcutaneous fat just below the hide of the animal. Body fat reserves are important because they are the main energy reserves of the body which the animal can use to maintain her production when she is underfed or incorrectly fed. It is important to handle sheep on a regular basis so as to get your “eye in” on the condition of the ewes in your flock.

Ewes should be handled at the following points: over and around the backbone, the loin area behind the last rib, above the kidney along the top and sides of the backbone.

Body condition is scored on a scale from 1-5. A score of 1 would indicate an undernourished animal whereas a score of 5 would indicate an overfat animal. Overfat and equally thin ewes at lambing can lead to lambing difficulties and increased mortality.

#### Body Condition Score Targets

Time	Condition Score	
Mid Pregnancy	3	3
Lambing	3	3



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