

## **Autumn grassland management**

The year is progressing and autumn is fast approaching so the focus of grassland management on dairy farms should be shifting slightly from now on. All summer the target should have been to graze covers of 1,300 to 1,500 kg dry matter per hectare in order to create a balance between feeding the dairy cow and ensuring cows graze out to 4 cm to maintain pasture quality. It is really important to walk the farm once a week to ensure that you know how the farm is growing.

Autumn is a hugely important time of year for grassland management as it determines the amount of grass available for grazing the following spring. Once the last of second cut silages are tidied up over the next couple of weeks the entire farm will become available for grazing. Reseeded swards will be coming back into the rotation over the next 6-8 weeks also. The objective now for grassland management should be to build covers to ensure that the highest cover on the farm will be around mid-September. This will ensure that sufficient grass will be on the farm into October and possibly November depending on soil type, location of farm and indeed stocking rate.

Cover per cow will be the main figure to look at currently. At a stocking rate of a cow/acre of 2.5 cows/hectare a cover per cow of 200kg DM with a rotation length of 25 days is ideal. At this stocking rate and a demand of 18kg DM/cow the demand is 45kg DM/ha/day but in the Kerry Limerick region last week we were still experiencing growth rates of over 70 kg DM/ha/day so surpluses are appearing on many farms. These need to be dealt with sooner rather than later by taking the high covers for big bale silage, as recovery will be less on these swards as we move closer to September. Also these heavy covers will become excessively high and will be very difficult to graze out during September.

By the 1<sup>st</sup> September the rotation length should be increased to 30 days and a cover per cow of 300 kg DM. From mid-September to 1<sup>st</sup> October the cover per cow should be 400kg DM and rotation length should be around 40 days to cater for lower growth rates. Where there is sufficient grass supply as is the case on most farms at the moment there will be little benefit with supplementation with concentrates particularly when you take current milk prices into consideration. However farms with high stocking rates (>2.5 Lu/ha) may need to introduce some concentrates in order to extend the rotation length. Your local Teagasc advisor can help you with your autumn grassland management decisions.