

Grassland management tips

This spring proved to be one of the most difficult in terms of grassland management. Most dairy farmers in Co. Limerick have cows out by day and many are out by night. The target of having 30% of the farm grazed by 1st March was not met in many cases but many a lot of grazing has been done in March and cows are getting through grass fast at this time of year. Calving seems to have gone well for most with the calving pattern both early and compact. This means that there are a lot of cows hitting peak milk production in the coming weeks and therefore will have larger dry matter intakes.

Because grazing was late in most cases farmers need to walk the farm now to see how much grass is on the farm. In particular the area grazed first should be noted as this will dictate the start of the second rotation and there is a risk of running out of grass in a couple of weeks' time at the start of the second rotation. These fields should have a cover of around 1000 kg dm/hectare now to have sufficient grass on them when they will be grazed again.

Post grazing residuals also need to be managed and cows should graze to 3.5-4 cms. Paddocks that are not grazed out well at this time of year will have reduced quality on subsequent rotations. Also if cows get into the habit of not grazing out now it will be difficult to train them to graze to 3.5- 4 cms for the rest of the year. Allocating grass properly will ensure that this is kept under control.

Finally nitrogen is really important. It has been hard for many to time fertiliser applications due to soil traffic ability this spring. However due to large growth rates over the winter there will have very little nitrogen left in the soil this spring. 70 units of N per acre applied by 1st April is used as a target for spring nitrogen. While most areas of the farm will have received nitrogen by now it is very important that the areas that haven't get at least a bag of urea per acre as soon as possible.