

The Spring Rotation Planner

Martina Harrington, Teagasc Beef Specialist

What is it?

It is a tool used by farmers to plan out their first grazing rotation. A plan will ensure that grass is grazed early enough to allow time for re-growth for the second rotation and to ensure grass does not run out before we start the second rotation.

How does it work?

It is purely based on target areas and dates. Once you know the date you are letting out stock and the targets, you know how much land you have to graze per day, week and month

- 30% of your farm grazed by the 1st of March
- 60% of your farm grazed by St. Patrick's Day
- 100% of your farm grazed by "Magic Day" usually 1st - 10th of April

These are a guide for drier farms, if you have a heavier farm you will be 7-14 days behind these targets.

Once you know the targets you can draw up a plan for your own farm. The example below shows two different dates of letting out stock on drier farms and an example of a heavier farm plan.

Farm area 100 ha 30% by 1 st March 30 ha 60% St. Patrick's Day 60 ha 100% by 5 th April 100ha			
Week starting	Area Grazed - Dry Farm	Area Grazed - Dry Farm	Area grazed - Heavy farm
Feb 8 th - 14 th	10 ha		
Feb 15 th - 21 st	20 ha	15 ha	
Feb 22nd - 28th 30%	30ha	30 ha	10 ha
March 1 st - 7 th	45ha	45 ha	20 ha
March 8th - 14th 60%	60ha	60 ha	30 ha
March 15 th - 21 st	73	73	45 ha
March 22 nd - 28 th	86	86	60 ha
March 29 th - 4 th April	100	100	73 ha
April 5 th - 11 th	Begin 2nd rotation		86 ha
April 12 th - 18 th			100 ha
April 19 th - 25 th			Begin 2nd rotation

General rules

- Graze down to 3.5 - 4cm. You need to get really good clean outs on the first rotation to set up top quality swards for the rest of the year.
- Turn cattle out onto medium covers on the driest ground first to get them used to eating grass down to 3.5 - 4cm. This should take a week or so.
- Then move into heavier covers.
- Try to graze reseeds and fields with good soil fertility first to allow for faster regrowth's
- Graze 30% of your grazing paddocks first, this is to allow them enough time to regrow for the second rotation in April.
- Graze silage ground from early March and be out of it by the end of March. This is to allow silage enough time to grow and bulk before cutting from the 15th - 26th of May - before grass really starts to head. The earlier you cut, the better quality silage you will have.
- Once out of silage ground move back into grazing paddocks.
- Keep an eye on regrowth on the first paddocks grazed. If they are ahead of target you may be able to end the first rotation earlier, if they are behind you may need to slow down.
- If you have stock out you should have a least some fertiliser/slurry out. Break your farm up in to thirds, heavy, medium and light covers.
 - » **Medium stocked farm 140kgs N/Ha** – graze the third with heaviest covers before applying fertiliser, put 23 units per acre of protected urea on the third with medium covers and put 2,500 gallons per acre of slurry on the last third with lowest covers. Apply protected urea to first third once grazed and start your second round of fertiliser mid-to late March. This should be around 30 units of nitrogen per acre, if possible in the form of a bag and a half of 18-6-12.
 - » **High stocked farm 170kgs N/Ha +** - Apply 23 units per acre of protected urea to the two thirds of the farm with medium to heavy covers as soon as conditions allow in early spring. Apply 2,500 gallons of slurry per acre to the third with the lowest covers. The second round of fertiliser needs to be applied by mid-March, 30 units of nitrogen per acre, if possible in the form of a bag and a half of 18-6-12 per acre.
 - » **Lowly stocked farms < 130kgs N/ha.** Graze the heavy covers, apply slurry to two thirds of the farm with lowest covers, if you don't have enough slurry apply 23 units of protected urea per acre to cover that. Apply 23 units of protected urea per acre on a weekly basis to paddocks as they are grazed.

What if you are behind your targets?

- Let out more stock
- Graze more of the lighter covers until you catch up

What if you are ahead of your targets?

- Graze heaviest covers
- Re-house some stock
- Supplement with hay/silage or meal
- Can you graze silage ground for a second time?

Have a wet weather plan

- If in February your wet fields are dry, graze them.
- If not go to driest fields, that have good access to the yard
- Use temporary roads to move cattle, don't move back over grazing ground
- Use back fencing to avoid excessive damage
- Rehouse if damage is too severe

Spring Rotation Planner for a Dry Farm

Farm area _____ ha

30% by 1st March _____ ha

60% by St. Patrick's Day _____ ha

100% by 5th April _____ ha

Week	Area Grazed - Dry Farm
February 8 th - 14 th	
February 15 th - 21 st	
Feb 22nd - 28th 30%	
March 1 st - 7 th	
March 8th - 14th 60%	
March 15 th - 21 st	
March 22 nd - 28 th	
March 29 th - 4 th April	
April 5 th - 11 th	Begin the second rotation
April 12 th - 18 th	
April 19 th - 25 th	

Spring Rotation Planner for a Heavy Farm

Farm area _____ ha

30% by 14th March _____ ha

60% by 28th March _____ ha

100% by 18th April _____ ha

Week	Area Grazed - Heavy Farm
February 15 th – 21 st	
February 22 nd – 28 th	
March 1 st - 7 th	
March 8th - 14th 30%	
March 15 th - 21 st	
March 22nd - 28th 60%	
March 29 th - 4 th April	
April 5 th – 11 th	
April 12 th - 18 th	
April 19 th - 25 th	Begin the second rotation