Grass growth on our measuring beef and sheep farms remains unchanged from last week, at 28kg DM/ha/day. However, this is still around 40% ahead of the 10-year average figure for this time of the year.

Just showing – farms that got little or no early fertiliser out are reporting big farm covers as stock turn out to grass. For many, mowers will be out in April, as the battle against stem begins.

With luck, ground conditions will improve to allow stronger grass areas be taken for bales in advance of any main silage cuts.

The best grass managers will tell you that getting on top of grass in the coming weeks is the secret to a good grazing year. Traditionally the focus was on May, but with this year and last year’s early growth pattern, keeping a lid on things in April is becoming just as important.

Things should be tightening now as silage ground is closed up. The target from now to is 12 to 14 days of grazing on the farm – daily grazing demand being stock- ing rate in LU/ha x 18kg DM. So, a farm stocked at 1.9LU/ha will have a daily demand of 34.6kg DM/ha. Indeed, a farm stocked at 1.9LU/ha should be hitting its “magic day” any time now – that is, the point at which it is growing more grass than it utilises in a day.

A farm’s magic day is obviously stocking rate dependent, but most should be seeing theirs very soon, particularly given the dry, warm weekend in April.

Many around the country will be praying that the forecasters got this one right. Though growth has been good recently, ground conditions for many have not. There are plenty of stock around the country still indoors, even on good ground.

A lot of farmers had planned to go out last weekend, but the unsettled weather on Saturday put paid to these intentions. Big silage stocks from 2016 mean that many are happy to delay turnout for another couple of days.

What’s strange for such a small island is that there are some farmers hitting their magic day at the moment and on track to begin their second rotation of the farm soon, albeit a few days behind; while others have yet to get stock out to grass. Is it really all down to land type?

I turned out 11 cows that one of my bulls, so this will be out in April, as the battle against stem begins.

Grass+ Beef

CIARÁN LENEHAN
BEEF SPECIALIST
cleanehan@farmersjournal.ie

Kieran Noonan
Co Cork

System: suckler to weaning
Soil: heavy
Avg farm cover: 861kg DM/ha
Grass growth: 11kg DM/day

I have decided to close up ground for silage. Some of the ground wasn’t grazed in the spring, as weather was too wet to travel and now covers have run out of hand. I intend to cut silage any time from mid-May onwards. Quality is my No 1 target this year, given I am autumn calving and wish to reduce my meal intake to the minimum.

Land that received 2,500 to 3,000 gallons of slurry in spring will get two bags of urea per acre now, as I have enough P & K applied for a silage cut. In all, 3,000 gallons of cattle slurry is worth around 20 units of N, 18 units of P and 90 units of K. Any land that got little or no slurry will be balanced with 0-7-30 or 18-6-12, depending on requirements.

Once my nutrient management plan is complete I will begin to work on improving my soil fertility. As I have some peat land I might not have large lime requirements.

I intend to turn out stock again towards the weekend.

Wesley Browne
Co Monaghan

System: suckler to bull beef
Soil: heavy
growth: 11kg DM/day

I have large lime requirements and some peatland I might not need to work on improving this year.

I am going to work on requirements.

With this year and last year’s early growth pattern, keeping a lid on things in April is becoming just as important.

Things should be tightening now as silage ground is closed up. The target from now is 12 to 14 days of grazing on the farm – daily grazing demand being stocking rate in LU/ha x 18kg DM. So, a farm stocked at 1.9LU/ha will have a daily demand of 34.6kg DM/ha. Indeed, a farm stocked at 1.9LU/ha should be hitting its “magic day” any time now – that is, the point at which it is growing more grass than it utilises in a day.

A farm’s magic day is obviously stocking rate dependent, but most should be seeing theirs very soon, particularly given the dry, warm weekend in April.

Many around the country will be praying that the forecasters got this one right. Though growth has been good recently, ground conditions for many have not. There are plenty of stock around the country still indoors, even on good ground.

A lot of farmers had planned to go out last weekend, but the unsettled weather on Saturday put paid to these intentions. Big silage stocks from 2016 mean that many are happy to delay turnout for another couple of days.

What’s strange for such a small island is that there are some farmers hitting their magic day at the moment and on track to begin their second rotation of the farm soon, albeit a few days behind; while others have yet to get stock out to grass. Is it really all down to land type?

I turned out 11 cows that one of my bulls, so this will be out in April, as the battle against stem begins.

Grass+ Beef

CIARÁN LENEHAN
BEEF SPECIALIST
cleanehan@farmersjournal.ie

Kieran Noonan
Co Cork

System: suckler to weaning
Soil: heavy
Avg farm cover: 861kg DM/ha
Grass growth: 11kg DM/day

I have decided to close up ground for silage. Some of the ground wasn’t grazed in the spring, as weather was too wet to travel and now covers have run out of hand. I intend to cut silage any time from mid-May onwards. Quality is my No 1 target this year, given I am autumn calving and wish to reduce my meal intake to the minimum.

Land that received 2,500 to 3,000 gallons of slurry in spring will get two bags of urea per acre now, as I have enough P & K applied for a silage cut. In all, 3,000 gallons of cattle slurry is worth around 20 units of N, 18 units of P and 90 units of K. Any land that got little or no slurry will be balanced with 0-7-30 or 18-6-12, depending on requirements.

Once my nutrient management plan is complete I will begin to work on improving my soil fertility. As I have some peat land I might not have large lime requirements.

I intend to turn out stock again towards the weekend.

Wesley Browne
Co Monaghan

System: suckler to bull beef
Soil: heavy
Grass growth: 11kg DM/day

I have large lime requirements and some peatland I might not need to work on improving this year.

I am going to work on requirements.

With this year and last year’s early growth pattern, keeping a lid on things in April is becoming just as important.

Things should be tightening now as silage ground is closed up. The target from now is 12 to 14 days of grazing on the farm – daily grazing demand being stocking rate in LU/ha x 18kg DM. So, a farm stocked at 1.9LU/ha will have a daily demand of 34.6kg DM/ha. Indeed, a farm stocked at 1.9LU/ha should be hitting its “magic day” any time now – that is, the point at which it is growing more grass than it utilises in a day.

A farm’s magic day is obviously stocking rate dependent, but most should be seeing theirs very soon, particularly given the dry, warm weekend in April.

Many around the country will be praying that the forecasters got this one right. Though growth has been good recently, ground conditions for many have not. There are plenty of stock around the country still indoors, even on good ground.

A lot of farmers had planned to go out last weekend, but the unsettled weather on Saturday put paid to these intentions. Big silage stocks from 2016 mean that many are happy to delay turnout for another couple of days.

What’s strange for such a small island is that there are some farmers hitting their magic day at the moment and on track to begin their second rotation of the farm soon, albeit a few days behind; while others have yet to get stock out to grass. Is it really all down to land type?
Clever paddocks in Co Louth

This week, Ciarán Lenehan spent time on Martin O’Hare’s farm in Dundalk, where a large silage field has been transformed for grazing

One of the many excuses used by the anti-paddock brigade is the inconvenience that the extra infrastructure brings when the silage harvester comes out – more gaps to negotiate, more strips that the blades can’t get to and tighter turns. Cost is the other pevee of paddock-sceptics, though many drystock farmers will say it’s the best money they’ve spent. This spring, one of our northeastern BETTER farmers looks to have overcome both of these issues with a clever adaptation of his grazing area.

Martin O’Hare’s farm 60ha (42ha of grassland and 18ha of tillage) of free-draining land near Dundalk in Co Louth. Full-time farmer, he calves 20 suckler cows in 2016 but plans to hit the 100-cow mark in the future. The BETTER farm team identified this 16ac field as Martin’s perfect go-to for silage, because of the way the silage is utilised at the shoulders of the year when grass is of high value, while also remaining conscious that this was a silage field – we did not want it to be split into too many small divisions. We decided on one permanent fence to split the field in two, with the straining post located 45ft from the boundary to allow the headland to be easily harvested at silage time. Two water troughs were purchased and installed along the central splitter fence in such a way that each trough serves four paddocks – the field is now split into eight grazing areas. Pipe was put into grass in 2016 and even more will be in 2017.

Extra grass
“None of our progeny see a second winter post-weaning here, so I’m very conscious that I need to squeeze up cow numbers to make use of this extra grass. The tillage situation is frustrating and more water points in a cost-effective but practical manner.

Permanent split
The decision was made to introduce one permanent split down the centre of the field, which was unique about this split, however, was the fact that the strainer posts are located about 45ft out from the ditches. This allows the silage harvester to do the field’s headlands without having to negotiate fences. Two strands of temporary wire connect the strainer posts to the perimeter fence. Two water troughs were purchased and installed.

He begins calving in January and finishes up in mid-March so he has both young stock and cows with calves for early grass. Martin also likes keeping his sucklers at home, where roadways better facilitate AI breeding than on his out-farms.

Silage
“There have been 27 cows and their calves on that field for the past 18 days [up to 1 April]. Today will probably be their last grazing before closing up. This will help with the anti-paddock brigade, though Martin uses gared temporary reeels to allocate his paddocks. Thus far Martin is using two gared reeels that follow the group around the block. However, purchasing a third is advisable to make moving paddocks easier.

Adviser comment
Tommy Cox
When walking the farm we saw this was an excellent dry field, which had potential to grow a lot of grass throughout the year. We evaluated the different options for best dividing the field in order to maximise grass utilisation at the shoulders of the year when grass is of high value, while also remaining conscious that this was a silage field – we did not want it to be split into too many small divisions. We decided on one permanent fence to split the field in two, with the straining post located 45ft from the boundary to allow the headland to be easily harvested at silage time. Two water troughs were strategically placed along the division to allow the field to be subdivided into eight paddocks using temporary fences, which allows Martin to get a clean out of all grass before closing up. This will help with his 2017 silage quality, as all dead material is now easily removed from the sward.