

Grass+ beef is powered by farmers in the BETTER farm Beef Programme

Grass+



# Grazing becoming more difficult

**NATHAN TUFFY**  
**WESTERN LIVESTOCK**  
**SPECIALIST**

ntuffy@farmersjournal.ie

**S**now across many parts of the country earlier in the week further hampered efforts by many farmers to continue grazing stock. In some areas stock had to be re-housed due to ground conditions. However, farmers who have light stock out are continuing to let them graze.

In the southeast and where there is drier ground, farmers have been able to keep calved cows and calves out through the poor weather.

## KEY POINTS

- ➔ Reduce the stocking rate or allocate grass on a daily basis.
- ➔ Move stock on to fresh pasture once grazed to 6-7cm.
- ➔ Increase supplementation rates to weanlings at grass.
- ➔ Where spring-born calves and cows are at grass, ensure they are in a sheltered area.
- ➔ Avoid turnout until conditions improve.

Where stock continue to

be grazed, efforts are being made to allocate grass on a daily basis while reducing the stocking rate and avoiding grazing out paddocks until conditions improve.

Target pre-grazing sward heights are approximately 1,500kg DM/ha (11cm).

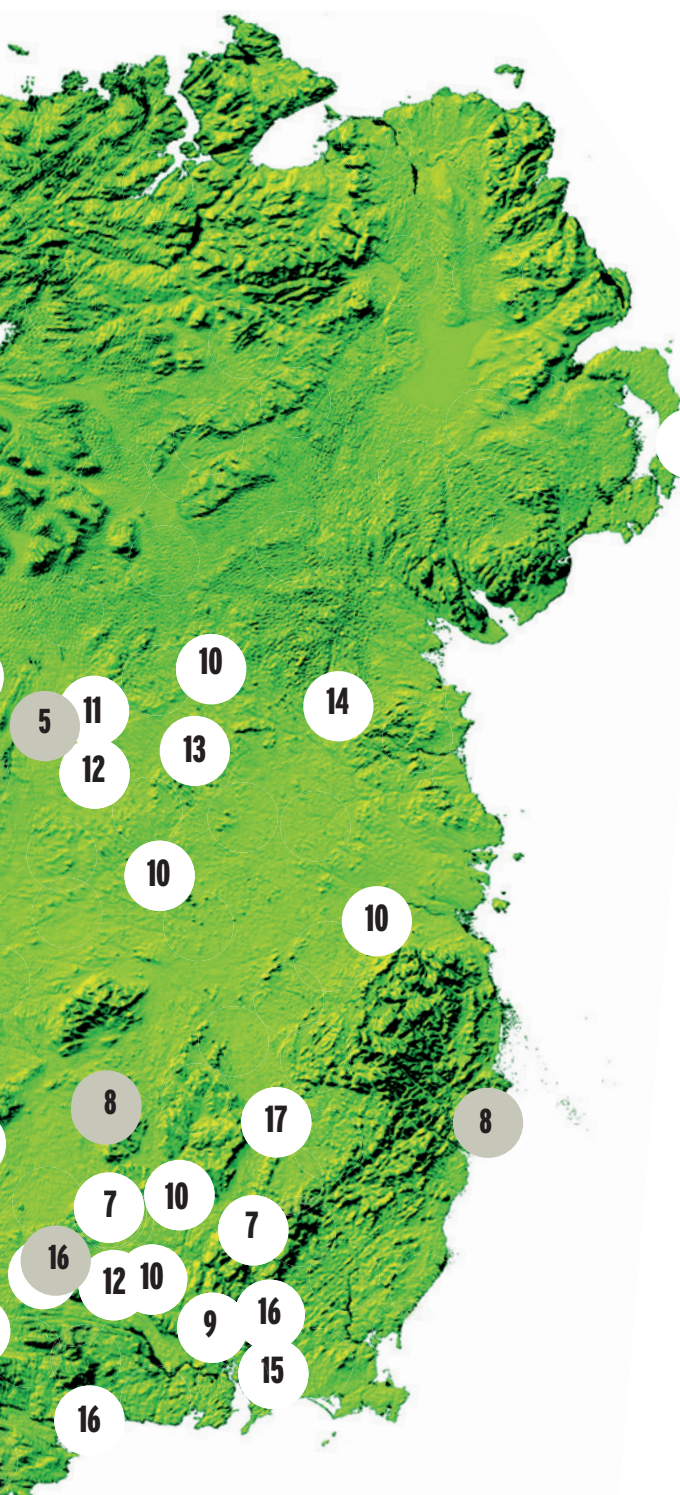
Where stock have been re-housed, the spring rotation planner will be adjusted when grazing recommences.

Because ground conditions are poor, fertilizer and slurry application has now ceased. Some farmers will apply fertilizer again when conditions improve in the coming weeks. The inclement weather conditions are harsh for spring-born calves that

are out. Where they are at grass, farmers are ensuring that there is adequate shelter in fields. In addition, they are being herded more regularly to identify any early signs of pneumonia or chills.

## Supplementation

Where weanlings are grazing, some farmers have re-introduced or increased supplementation rates. Where autumn-born calves are grazing, they are being supplemented with 0.5-1kg concentrates per day. Calves that are creep grazing out of sheds are spending slightly less time at grass, but supplementation rates remain steady.



**Donal Scully**  
 Co Limerick

Farming system	Suckler to U16 bulls
Land type	Medium to dry
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	16
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	709

I have an average farm cover of 709kg DM/ha and a current grassland stocking rate of 0.52 lu/ha. Grass growth for the last week recorded 16kg DM/ha, which was higher than expected. Current soil temperature is 6.3 degrees celcius.

Land has gotten 2,000 gallons/acre slurry and 23 units of urea during January and February, so the nitrogen is starting to take effect. Ground is extremely wet here at the moment after the rain and snow of the last few weeks. I was grazing four- to six-month old bulls and heifers by day on some of the drier paddocks, but had to cease this activity last week when ground conditions deteriorated further.

Silage is getting scarce now and to preserve what I have left in the pit, I purchased some zero grazed grass from a local contractor. Once weather has cleared up I will aim to start turning out calves again, followed by yearling heifers which were purchased as calves last year.



**James Madigan**  
 Co Kilkenny

Farming system	Suckler to beef
Land type	Dry free draining
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	N/A
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	718

Calving started in early January and I have nine cows left to calve out of 40. So far, I have a calf for each cow, despite some tricky calvings. I slaughtered my 2013 spring-born bullocks in January and February at 25 months and they averaged 418kg carcass and graded R+3=. I have a good bank of grass built up on the farm since last autumn and my average farm cover is 718kg DM/ha. My heaviest covers are 1,500kg DM/ha (10cm) and will need to be grazed out well when the weather improves.

I had my autumn calves grazing during the day since 1 February and I had 28 yearling heifers grazing full-time from 10 to 20 February. I have approximately 15% of the farm grazed off. I housed all the stock when the weather became unsettled as I want to avoid poaching the paddocks. From late January, I spread 2,500 gals/ac of slurry on paddocks that were closed last with the lowest covers and to the paddocks that were grazed off first.



**David Walsh**  
 Co Tipperary

Farming system	Suckler to store/beef
Land type	Heavy
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	16
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	694

I currently have 15 cows and calves out at grass along with 18 yearling heifers. These have been grazing for almost a month now and are grazing out paddocks well in two- to three-day blocks with only very minor damage on wet days. If weather improves in a week I will turn out another 15 cows and calves and following that I will start turning out the rest of my yearlings. I had planned on having more cows turned out by now but rain and snow put a stop to that.

My average farm cover is currently 694kg DM/ha, while I grew 16kg DM/ha last week. I spread 23 units of urea over all covers of 600-900kg DM. Slurry went out on any bare paddocks and any heavier covers were grazed and will be followed up with 2,500 gallons of slurry or 35 units of urea. I plan to spread two bags per acre of 18-6-12 on all ground in late March. My P and K indices were mainly between 2 and 3 at last soil test and I want to increase them by targeting slurry at lower indices and with compound fertilizer.



**Frank and Des Beirne**  
 Co Longford

Farming system	Suckler to beef
Land type	Heavy
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	5
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	520

Weather conditions have been very difficult for the past week. Low soil temperatures have resulted in very low grass growths. As we have slurry spread and fertilizer out, we are hopeful the forecasted rise in temperatures will spur on growth.

Ground conditions are poor at the moment with a lot of surface water left due to the melted snow. We still have one group of bulls out grazing at the moment and they are doing well. They are getting 1kg of barley per head since the snow. The second group of bulls was housed early last week to reduce the chance of poaching occurring. We intend to go back out with this group of bulls early next week, weather permitting.

We have started to wean the autumn-born calves. This will reduce our demand for grass at the moment. The spring calving season is in full swing, with four calves born last weekend, bringing the number up to 29 calves on the ground at the moment.

**>> This week we feature two farmers in the west who are availing of early spring grass in order to maximise gain from grass on their calves**

**- BETTER farm >> 46**

**BETTER farm**  
**Beef Programme**





# BETTER farm Beef Programme



A TEAGASC/IRISH FARMERS  
JOURNAL INITIATIVE



In association with



Billy Gilmore and Richard Jennings both breed cows to AI with the aim of targeting most of their bull and heifer calves at the high-value export market. As they are both situated in areas of high rainfall, grazing in early spring is difficult. However, land type on both farms is dry, which does help to ease the pressure

## ON THE GROUND

### BILLY GILMORE, GALWAY

“Calves are weaned at about 5-6 months of age, with weaning starting in mid-January”

**B**illy Gilmore runs a herd of 35 suckler cows and sells progeny weanlings. He also has 105 ewes and grows 4ha (10 acres) of tillage on a mixture of owned and rented land near Tuam, Co Galway.

The herd is fully autumn-calving, starting in August and finishing in November. The winter management of calves is simple on the farm. The cows are fed 1kg barley and mineral per day until they are back in calf. Also, 74 DMD silage is fed ad-lib. Cows were in very good condition. The calves are supplemented with less than 1.5kg at weaning and are now

back on 1kg of meal per day outside.

Unlike most farmers in the programme, Billy is not able to creep graze these calves during the early spring as he has just 3 acres of ground around the sheds. Instead, he has adopted a system of early weaning. Calves are weaned at about 5-6 months of age, with weaning starting in mid-January.

Although the calf has only a short time on the cow, Billy feels the system works fine as he is achieving excellent weight gain up to weaning and he can get the calf to grass early. Land fragmentation means grassland management can be tricky. With-



In-calf heifers on Billy Gilmore's farm have been fed ad-lib silage alone since housing. They weighed 538kg on 24 January and are due to calve down from November on.

out early weaning, calves would not get to grass in the first week of February.

#### Spring grazing

The sheep were housed just last week on the farm. The average farm cover is low at about 375kg DM/ha. Billy grazes the ewes all year round with them only being housed for the three weeks of lambing, which results in low spring covers. Three weeks ago Billy spread about 23 units N per acre on approximately 45 acres of pasture. Slurry was spread at

a rate of 2,500gals per acre on about 25 acres. The bulls and heifers are at grass since the start of February. Although the average farm cover is low, the weanlings are being strip-grazed on fields with covers in excess of 1,500kgDM/ha. Supplementation is continuing at a rate of about 1kg/head/day, but this will be reduced to 0.5kg when conditions improve. Demand for grass in early spring is not very high on the farm. The weanlings are a priority, as are the ewes. There is a group of 44 in-calf heifers

on the farm also. They will be turned out in late March, when grass supply builds. As the suckler cows are dry, they are not priority stock and will be put out to grass when available. Cows will be allocated grass every few days to keep intakes low and body condition score (BCS) will be monitored.

#### Weight gain

The 20 autumn-born bull weanlings were weighed on 24 January at an average age of 5.3 months. They weighed 294kg on average

#### KEY POINTS

- ➔ Autumn-born calves out grazing heavy covers.
- ➔ Strip grazing being carried out with the electric fence moved every one-to-three days.
- ➔ Where ground conditions are wet, calves are not being held to graze out paddocks.
- ➔ Urea has been spread at a rate of 23 units N/Acre.
- ➔ Slurry has been applied at a rate of 2,500gals/acre.
- ➔ Calves are being supplemented with 0.5kg concentrates at grass.

and had a weight gain of 1.26kg/day since weaning. On the same day a group of 15 heifer calves were weighed at 4.1 months of age. They weighed 182kg having gained 1.09kg/day since birth. The group of 44 in-calf heifers were housed in late October and have been fed on 74DMD silage during the winter months. No supplementation has been given to these heifers and they are in good BCS. They are a mixture of homebred and bought-in heifers and on 24 January they weighed 538kg on average; the heaviest was over 620kg. All heifers are due to calve from November on.

## ON THE GROUND

### RICHARD JENNINGS, MAYO

“Grazing started in late December and grass intakes are growing”

**A**lthough Richard Jennings is also targeting the high-value live export market, neither calving nor weaning takes place as early as it does on Billy's farm. Richard's land, although split by a road, is all contained in one area.

He runs a herd of about 50 suckler cows and calves along with a flock of 85 ewes.

Calving started in early November and ended in January. In the first two months, 41 of the 55 cows calved. As some of Richard's farm is very wet and peaty in nature, the ewes are used primarily as a management tool for grazing off wetter areas on which cattle are unable to travel. Richard feels that although he could have a lot more cows without the sheep,

they are a major bonus from grassland management point of view, particularly in a wet year.

#### Grassland Management

Slurry has been spread at a rate of about 2,000 gals/acre on about 25 acres of bare grassland. This year Richard has changed from grazing silage ground with suckler cows and calves to grazing with sheep.

Ewes were put onto the silage ground in late December, and once grazed off the ewes were housed and slurry was applied.

Nitrogen in the form of Urea was spread on 40 acres at a rate of a half bag per acre. The average farm cover is about 400kg DM/ha as ewes were out grazing on some of the farm over winter months prior to housing. Ground conditions are quite poor at the moment, but Richard has allowed all calves access to grass by day from the sheds.

There are over 40 acres available for grazing near the sheds. Grazing started in late December and grass intakes are growing as the calves mature. It is being carried out in the field adjoining the sheds using a strip wire, which is being moved daily.

The wet conditions over the past week have led to some tracking around the gate, and grass utilisation has suffered slightly also. However, the clear focus is to continue to graze off the

field using the strip wire, although the target of grazing out to 4cm has been abandoned until ground conditions improve.

Calves are grazing down to about 7cm (750kgDM/ha). When cows are turned out later in the spring, the areas grazed lightly by the calves in early spring will be grazed tight to 4cm. Although calves are out grazing, supplementation is continuing at a rate of 0.5kg concentrates per calf per day.



Calves have been out to grass daily since late December on Richard Jennings' farm. A strip wire is being used to allocate grass on a daily basis.

#### Indoor management

The calves have free access to the field or the shed during the day, but they are housed each evening. No bedding has been used inside so far this year.

In the majority of the calf creeps, timber sheep slats are used to provide calves with a clean lying area.

In one shed Richard is using rubber mats which are scraped clean twice a day. He feels that the calves are more content, drier and cleaner on the sheep slats.

The one major advantage to the slats is the reduction in labour and the cost saving on straw.

He also feels there is less of a smell of ammonia compared with straw.

As the herd is autumn-calving, scour is not usually an issue on the farm.

Heat detection for cows is continuing, with tail painting carried out and teaser bulls used to detect heats. All AI is used on the farm.