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Grass+



# Grazing conditions are improving

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**W**hile growth rates seem to be increasing slowly on drier areas down south, where the ground remains wet, growth rates continue to be well below average. However, with an improved weather forecast, growth rates are expected to rise.

Fields that did not receive fertiliser in the last rotation because they were not trafficable are suffering the

most from low grass growth. Where sufficient fertiliser has been applied, even in wetter areas growth rates are improving.

With growth running just slightly ahead of demand on most farms, there is a reluctance to remove surplus grass from paddocks just yet, especially where growth rates are low.

However, where days ahead are over 14, some farmers are opting to apply some additional fertiliser on fields with heavy covers, with the aim of harvesting these with first-cut silage in the coming weeks.

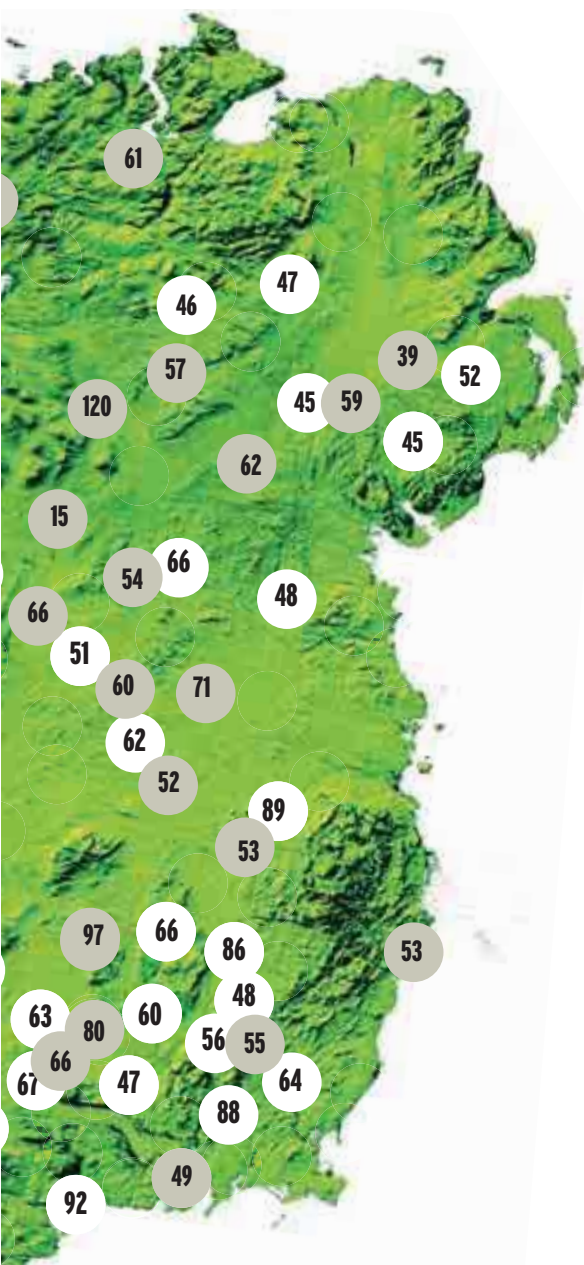
## KEY POINTS

- ➔ Grass growth rates improving in drier areas.
- ➔ Ground conditions remain difficult, but are improving.
- ➔ Topping is being carried out to improve quality where swards could not be grazed out.
- ➔ Surpluses will be taken out with first-cut silage.
- ➔ Fertiliser applications continue.

Grass utilisation is improving in all areas as ground dries out. Post-grazing sward heights of 4cm are being achieved again.

In some cases, farmers are planning on topping fields where utilisation was low, pasture contaminated and palatability has dropped.

Where fields have not received fertiliser in the past three to four weeks due to ground conditions, applying 27-30 units N/acre as soon as ground is trafficable is essential for maximising growth rates as temperatures and weather conditions improve.



**Trevor Minion**  
**Co Wicklow**

Farming system	Suckler to beef
Land type	Dry, free-draining
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	53
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	614

Grass growth has improved over the last two weeks in Wicklow as the nights have been a little milder. It's been a tough spring since cattle went to grass, as April was a harsh month and May has been slow to get going. My average farm cover is 614kg DM/ha, which is equivalent to about 6.5cm of grass across the whole farm. With the silage ground closed, I am stocked at 3.24 LU/ha (2,050kg liveweight/ha) on the grazing ground. My farm demand is 41kg DM/ha/day and growth last week was 53kg DM/ha/day, so I am growing an extra 12kg DM/ha/day than what is required. My pre-grazing covers are between 1,000-1,200kg DM/ha (9cm). During the heavy rain over the last few weeks, I haven't been able to graze paddocks out as tight as I would like and my rotation length is a little too short as I had to keep cattle moving. Hopefully this will settle back to 21 days. I have approximately 60 units of nitrogen spread to date and this is comprised of urea and 18-6-12. I will spread CAN on my next application.



**Mike Dillane**  
**Co Kerry**

Farming system	Suckler to weanling
Land type	Very heavy
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	65
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	1,102

My most recent growth rate was 65kg/DM/ha and I have an average farm cover of 1,102kg/ha. With silage ground closed up, I am running at 3.87LU/ha on the grazing area. I have followed up all grazings with 35-40 units per acre of N. This is keeping my growth ahead of demand so far, despite the challenging weather. I was lucky to avoid the first Saturday's heavy rain, but I have received my fair share since. To combat the current and oncoming bad weather, I am on/off grazing, housing cows and calves at night with no silage and grazing in two separate three-hour blocks during the day on the home farm. On the out-farm, I am grazing heavier ground by day in 12-hour blocks and moving to drier ground by night to try and avoid poaching. Silage will be cut at the end of May, so pressure will reduce then once aftergrass comes back into the rotation. I have killed another lot of stock, with bulls under 16 months averaging 440kg carcass weight. Sixteen-month heifers weighed 334kg carcass weight and were a mix of R and U grades.



**Niall Patterson**  
**Co Leitrim**

Farming system	Suckler to beef
Land type	Heavy
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	15
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	571

Grass growth has been very slow to get going this year, with only 15 kg/DM/ha recorded last week. All cattle are still housed due to the bad spring. I had replacement heifers turned out earlier, but they had to be re-housed. Ewes and lambs are doing well and I have been lucky to have enough grass for them so far. Cows were scanned last weekend. I have ceased feeding meal to cows which proved in-calf. Calves are now getting 1kg/head/day. I am currently purchasing silage as I ran out on Monday. Paddocks that are being grazed out by ewes are being followed with 30 units of N. Reseeded paddocks are really standing out this year in comparison with old pastures, which are not performing at all. Closed silage ground is way behind where it was this time last year. It received its second application of fertiliser last week of 45 units, bringing total nitrogen to 80 units/acre. If the weather and temperatures improve, grass growth should increase rapidly and allow cattle be turned out.



**Liam McWeeney**  
**Derrypatrick, Grange, Meath**

Farming system	Suckler to beef
Land type	Dry to heavy
Growth rate (kgDM/ha)	60
Avg Farm Cover (kgDM/ha)	918

We grew 60kg/DM/ha this week. Our demand is 52kg/dm/ha, so we are comfortably growing more than we need. Our stocking rate is currently 2,584kg/ha, with all stock back out grazing after some being housed for the last week. We are again achieving good post-grazing heights of 4cm-4.5cm. We currently have seven groups of stock at grass. We had two cases of pneumonia in young calves this week, which were treated with antibiotics. We decided to skip two paddocks with heavy covers this week and these will be taken out with the main silage cut in two weeks' time. We are also going to spray off 3.54ha (four paddocks) at the end of the week. We hope to reseed these via a direct drill operation, without ploughing. Taking out these paddocks to reseed will lift our demand to 55kg/DM/ha, which we should be able to meet over the coming weeks. Paddocks deficient in P and K received 2,000 gallons/acre of slurry via a trailing shoe last week and grazed paddocks received 27.5 units N/acre.

**GRAZING CONDITIONS ARE IMPROVING: Nathan Tuffy spoke to some BETTER Farm participants about how they are coping with the poor weather - BETTER farm >> 42**

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# GRAZING CONDITIONS IMPROVING

**Nathan Tuffy** spoke to some participants about how they are coping with the poor weather

Woodpark,  
Gorey,  
Co Wexford



**Cathal Crean, Co Wexford**

Weather has been difficult here in Wexford this spring. Some of our bulls had to be housed for about a week and the last of them went back to grass on Sunday last. The rain has meant that ground conditions were very soft.

During periods of heavy rain I was moving the cows, calves and bull indoors to reduce the risk of poaching. It did work very well but was very labour intensive. If they were only in for 12 hours, the bull wasn't an issue. But when they were in for longer than that, I had to make sure there was enough room for the bull to work indoors. This put a little pressure on housing.

Since the weekend, everything is at grass. Ground conditions are difficult, but improving day by day. Grass utilisation suffered, particularly with the bulls. During the cold and unsettled weather, the bulls were often along the ditches for shelter and not lying out in the fields as they would normally be.

There is no doubt that liveweight gains probably suffered a little as a result. We will be weighing the bulls in the next few weeks and we will know how they are doing then.

I offered the bulls grass on a daily basis, but they struggled to graze swards out as utilisation was poor. Utilisa-

**“I offered the bulls grass on a daily basis, but they struggled to graze swards out as utilisation was poor**

tion has improved dramatically in the last few days.

Because stock were housed for a few days, grass has got strong on a number of paddocks. As we don't have enough paddocks with ideal covers coming along, we will have no choice but to graze some heavier covers in the next week.

I have highlighted a few paddocks to close up for silage. They got about 27 units of N/acre and will be left for about two weeks to bulk up before cutting.

I will probably have to resort to topping some of the stronger paddocks and ones where utilisation was poor in the next few weeks to make sure that quality will not be affected in the next round. In a year like this, it makes you consider your stocking rate, particularly on heavy ground. I am lucky this year



With grazing conditions starting to improve, the focus is now on maintaining sward quality.

as my stocking rate is back slightly.

Kilteely,  
Co Limerick



**Donie Ahern, Co Limerick**

We have had a lot of heavy showers again early this week, but ground conditions are holding up pretty well. We are lucky that the farm is fairly dry in nature and has good soakage.

We did have a little problem a week or more ago when grazing conditions were difficult due to the rain. One thing I am noticing is that any ground that has got any damage at all is not soak-

ing very well and remaining sticky.

The bulls have been the most difficult during the wet weather and I have had to put a lot more management into them, but they remained settled and I avoided having to house them at any stage.

When ground was wet, I allocated fresh strip of grass sometimes even every three to four hours. I suppose I am lucky that I have been able to do so. Anyone that is working and farming would have to rely on allocating grass on a 12-hour basis.

I have four groups of bulls currently at grass. The bulls are run in groups of 20 to 26. The last group of bulls has been out at grass since 12 March. We will be weighing all the cattle on the farm in the next few weeks. Despite the bad weather, I still think that the bulls have had a good thrive so far this year.

We are planning to cut silage in the last days of May, weather permitting. You would be hopeful that we

would get a dry week before that. Grass growth has been good here, despite the cold, wet conditions. We currently have about 26 days grass ahead of stock, which is well above target.

On the home farm, where the bulls are, the pre-grazing covers are lower. Where the cows are grazing covers that are starting to get stronger, we may take paddocks out in the next few weeks. Across the whole farm we have about 310 head of cattle grazing on 64ha, so the stocking rate is high.

Ballykenny House,  
Newtownforbes  
Co Longford



**Des and Frank Beirne, Co Longford**

Ground conditions are still wet, but just about manageable. We kept the bulls out even during the bad weather, but moved them on a daily basis to avoid sward damage and poaching.

A group of 33 cows, calves and a bull were housed. They went back to grass last Thursday. While they were housed, some bulls were moved to continue grazing the cows' rotation. The bulls are still going into pre-grazing covers of 1,150-1,200kg DM/ha. This is because growth has been slow. I have 102 units N/acre

out on grazing ground so far, which has kept it going, but we still only have 15 days grazing ahead of stock. I had one field earmarked for re-seeding, but I started grazing it on Tuesday as grass supply was tight.

Hopefully growth will improve in the next few weeks and we will be able to take it out for reseed. Growth on the home farm this week was 58kg DM/ha. On the out farm it was 72kg DM/ha. The average is 66kg DM/ha, which is back by about 10kg DM/ha on last week.

I will have to top three to four paddocks in total. These are mainly ones that have had dirt and clay contamination. Two of them had heavy covers and the bulls were unable to graze them down.

I was spreading fertilizer at the end of each month. None has gone out since the end of April, so I will gauge whether to apply more by the nitrate left in the grass when I take a sample from silage swards in the next week.

I was hoping to cut silage in mid-May, but the crop needs to bulk up more, and ground conditions need to dry a little before we start.

The wet conditions have caused some damage to paddocks. One in particular was wet when grazed each time this spring. However, the damage is superficial. We will apply 18-6-12 to damaged paddocks in the next application.

Looking at the long-range weather forecast, conditions are expected to improve into early June with much warmer and more settled weather, so hopefully this will take the pressure off.



During wet conditions, bulls were moved on 12- to 24-hour intervals on most farms, some allocated bulls as often as every four hours.