

Recommended Grazing Management and Dairy Herd Nutrition for Spring 2015

The challenge for dairy farmers in spring 2015 is to reduce costs, maintain positive cash flows and get the best results from available spring grass supplies. This article highlights the principal grazing management recommendations for spring 2015.

An appropriate overall farm stocking rate for 2015

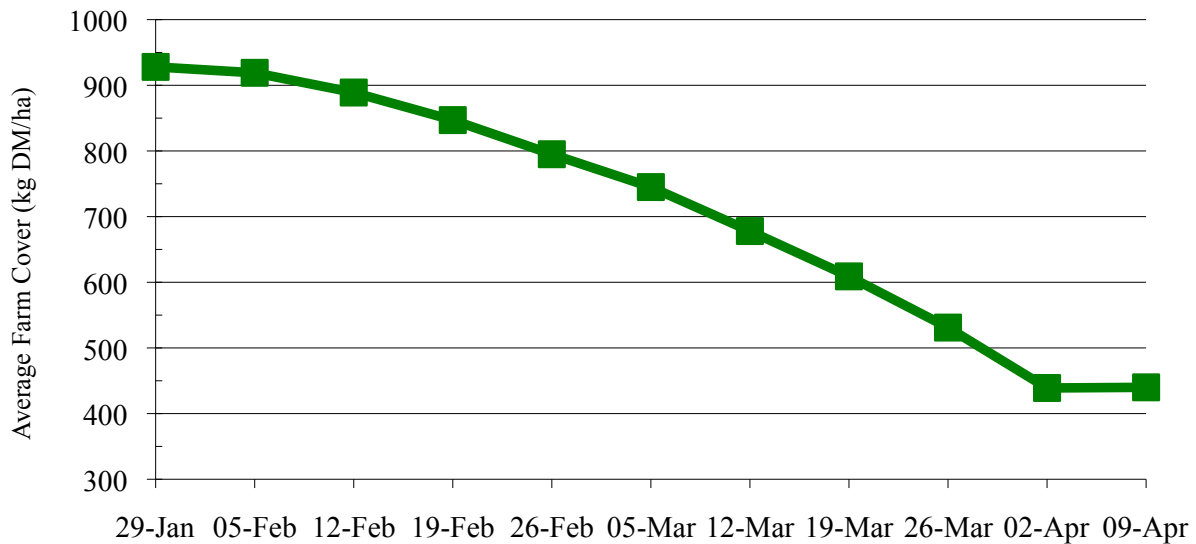
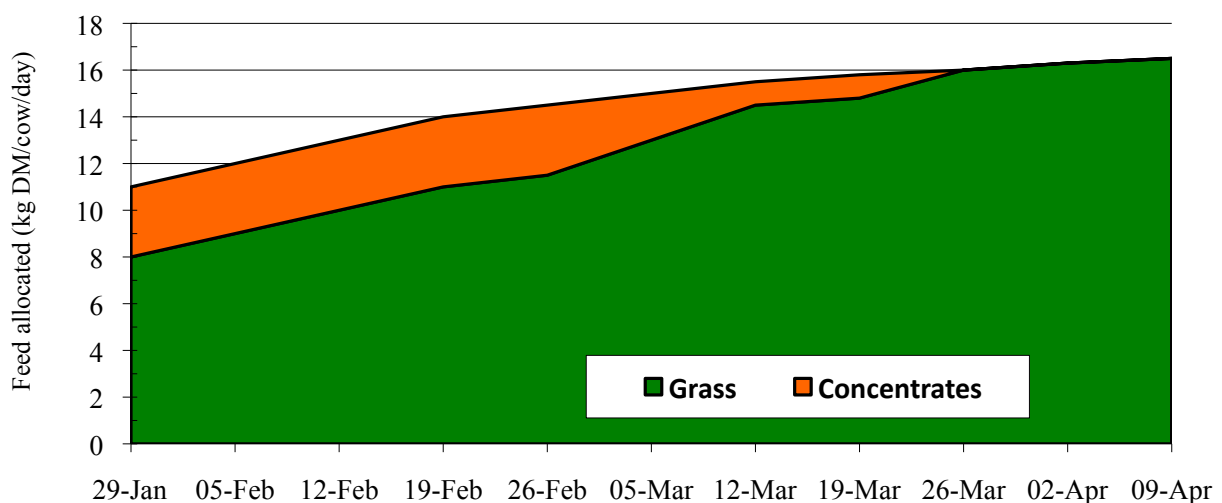
- There is no point keeping extra cows at low milk prices in 2015. Few farms have sufficient grass growth to justify an overall farm stocking rate (SR) greater than 2.5 to 2.7 livestock units (LU)/ha. Table 1 outlines the recommended SR for dairy farms depending on the quantity of grass grown.

Table 1: Recommended stocking rates for Irish dairy farms

Grass growth (tonnes DM/ha)	10	12	14	16
Supplementary feed inputs (tonnes DM/cow)				
0.25	1.7	2.1	2.4	2.8
0.50	1.8	2.2	2.5	3.0

Getting the most from Spring Grass

- Grazing management in the first 2 months after the start of calving is a key driver of spring milk production costs and animal performance into the mating season.
- Each additional day of grazing in spring increases farm profit by €2.70 per cow per day.
- The ideal average farm cover (AFC) of 900 kg DM/ha on February 1st allows a farm operating at a SR of 2.5 to 2.9 LU/ha to turn freshly calved cows out full time to a predominantly grass diet and extend the 1st rotation to April 5th, and requiring less than 300 kg concentrate/cow.
- The freshly calved cow has a low intake immediately post calving but intake will increase quickly to 13 kg DM/day by week 2 post calving and by 1 kg per week for each week thereafter until week 8. Figure 1 and 2 outline the target AFC and daily herd feed allowance for each week of spring 2015.
- The most efficient way to allocate spring grass is according to the Spring Rotation Planner (SRP). See leaflet entitled 'Allocating Spring Grass using the Spring Rotation Planner'.
- General recommendations for spring grazing
 - Graze paddocks to a residual of 3.5 cm in spring
 - On/off grazing for 3 hour intervals must be practiced when ground conditions are bad
 - Grazing silage ground twice is an excellent option to stretch spring grass

Figure 1: Recommended average farm cover (AFC; kg DM/ha) for a farm stocked at 2.7 LU/ha.**Figure 2:** Recommended feed allowances for the freshly calved mature dairy herd (kg DM/cow/calved) with a compact mean calving date of February 15th.

Fertiliser recommendations for February and March

- Spring Nitrogen (N) application is essential to boost grass growth on all paddocks.
- Immediately after the closed period for fertilizer and slurry application, the 20% of paddocks with the lowest herbage mass (<600 kg DM/ha) and the first 10% of the land area grazed in spring should receive 2,500 gallons of slurry per acre. The remainder of the land area should immediately get 23 units of urea per acre. (Urea remains 30% cheaper than alternatives/kg N).
- In early March, a further 30% of the land area should receive 2,500 gallons of slurry per acre while the remainder of the land area should get 40 units of Urea per acre.
- Pay close attention to weather forecasts. Avoid application of slurry or chemical N within 48 hours of expected heavy rainfall to minimise losses and maximise benefits. If you do not have time to spread chemical N and slurry, assign the task to a contractor.