

Setting Up a Grass Group

Standard Operating Procedure

- Identify a group of farmers in your area that are interested in improving grassland management skills, grass production and utilisation on their farm. The group should be established in December/ January, before the grazing season commences. There is always a small number of discussion group members from a number of discussion groups who would come together to form a grass group- this has been the experience of many advisors who have succeeded in setting up grass groups.
- Set up each farmer on PastureBase Ireland in December/January. Contact PBI support ([0469200965](tel:0469200965)) to set up farmers that need to be registered.
- Arrange the first group meeting in January. The agenda should be to:
 - outline the purpose of the group and how measuring grass can increase efficiency/profitability at farm level
 - Show the farmers how to use the basic tools on PastureBase Ireland
 - Show the farmers how to share their data with other farmers by sending invitations to each other. All links should be established during this meeting.
 - Get each farmer to set up a spring rotation planner and feed budget (dairy).
 - If farmers are not confident measuring grass in the field, the facilitator should then bring them on a grass walk and show farmers how to calculate covers in the field.
- The facilitator should make contact with each farmer to make sure that they will carry out an opening cover and provide them with sufficient support to be able to do this.
- A WhatsApp group is also useful to support farmers and answer queries.
- From there, organise a monthly meeting with the group. The host farmer and farmers attending should have grass measurements taken prior to the meeting. The facilitator should visit the host farmer prior to the meeting to see decisions being made at farm level. A group report should be ran on PastureBase and handed out to farmers. Check the dry matter on www.pbi.ie prior to any meetings (twitter feed or research farms)
- Topics of discussion at every meeting should be:
 - Average farm cover, cover/LU, days ahead
 - Growth vs Demand (supplement, stocking rate)
 - Pre grazing yields this should be cut and weighed with a quadrant and shears: e.g. $0.175\text{kg} \times 20\%\text{DM} \times 40,000 = 1400 \text{ kgDM/ha}$ target during main grazing season)
 - Residuals (implications of undergrazing and over grazing) -The post grazing height should be measured with a platemeter to determine the residual and grazing severity
 - Production levels (kgMS/cow, performance of calves/lambs etc.)
 - Spring rotation plan/ autumn rotation plan (shoulders of the year)
 - Grazing Infrastructure, soil fertility/ N application, reseeding
 - Any other business
- Recommendations should be given for both the host farmer and group members at the end of each meeting based on current performance (use a flip chart).

- An end of year meeting should take place in December reflecting on year gone by and plans for year ahead. Annual tonnage reports, planners, feed budgets, production levels, cost of production etc. should be discussed and targets set for year ahead.