

Back to basics on grazing tactics for spring 2024

GRAZED PASTURE gives Irish dairy farmers a potential cash cost advantage, however this potential will only be realized if the right tactics are employed in spring and across the grazing season. On Irish dairy farms there is a very strong relationship between farm financial performance and pasture utilised per hectare. Grassland measurement using the PastureBase Ireland (PBI) platform is a hugely important KPI for dairy farm management and should dictate the farm stocking rate, concentrate supplementation and fertiliser strategy for the farm. On farm costs have increased significantly over the last number of years so it is vital to get back to basics on grazing tactics for spring 2024. Have you got what it takes to be a “top 10% grassland farmer” in 2024?

This workshop will feature Joseph Dunphy (Teagasc Grass10), Brendan Horan (Teagasc Moorepark) and Joe Murphy (Kilkenny Dairy Farmer)

Topics will include:

- Spring grazing tips and tactics for dry and heavy soil types
- The do's and don'ts of spring grass budgeting
- Managing the “grass hungry” transition from the first to the second rotation
- Driving performance - getting grass allowances right in early summer

Spring grazing tips and tactics for dry and heavy soil types

Spring can be a time of low pasture availability due to low growth rates, especially if good autumn grazing management advice was not adhered to. However having a sufficiently high opening average farm cover (AFC) on your farm ensures adequate pasture availability to get cows grazing consistently throughout the spring. Getting cows to grass every day was worth €2.70/cow/day according to Teagasc research, however in recent years with the increased costs of farm inputs we now estimate this to be 40% higher at close to €4/cow/day.

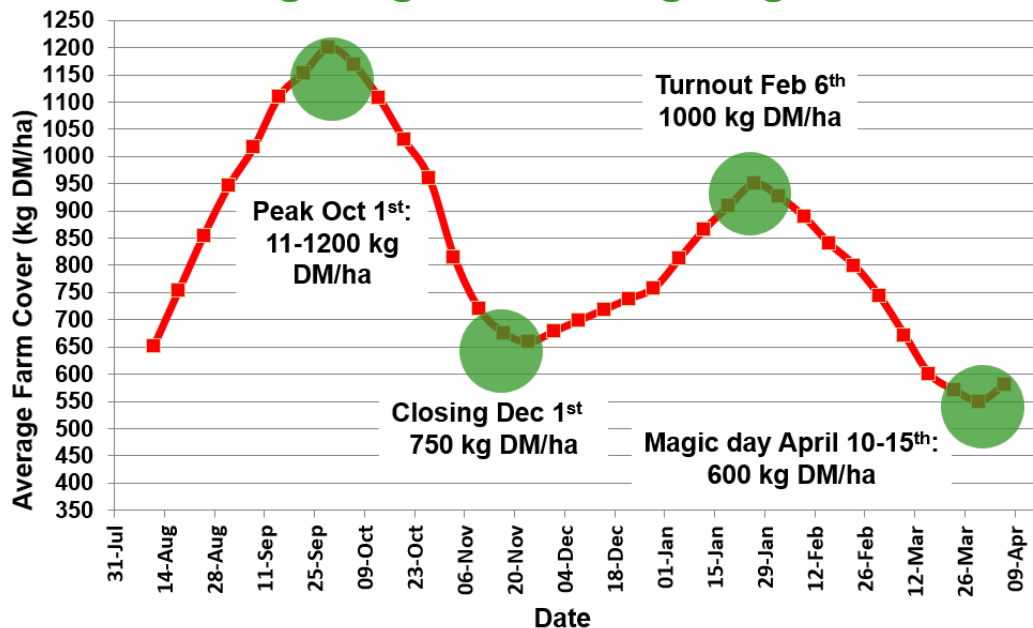
The key aim of spring grazing is to open with an Average Farm Cover of >900 Kg DM/Ha and keep grass in the diet every day through the spring using good grazing techniques and grazing infrastructure. In this session Brendan Horan, Teagasc Moorepark will discuss tips and tactics for dry and heavy soils to maximise grass in the diet in spring 2024.

The do's and don'ts of spring grass budgeting

A grass (feed) budget is a plan for grass supply based on expected growth and animal requirements during the feed expensive months of spring and autumn on Irish farms. In the absence of a feed budget the levels of silage fed and purchased concentrate in the diet are increased and a reduction in days at pasture is observed. Many high performing Irish dairy farmers are using the spring feed budgeting tool on PastureBase Ireland to their advantage to predict surpluses and deficits before they arise which allows timely action by the farmer. In this session we will discuss with Kilkenny dairy farmer Joe Murphy on why he uses the

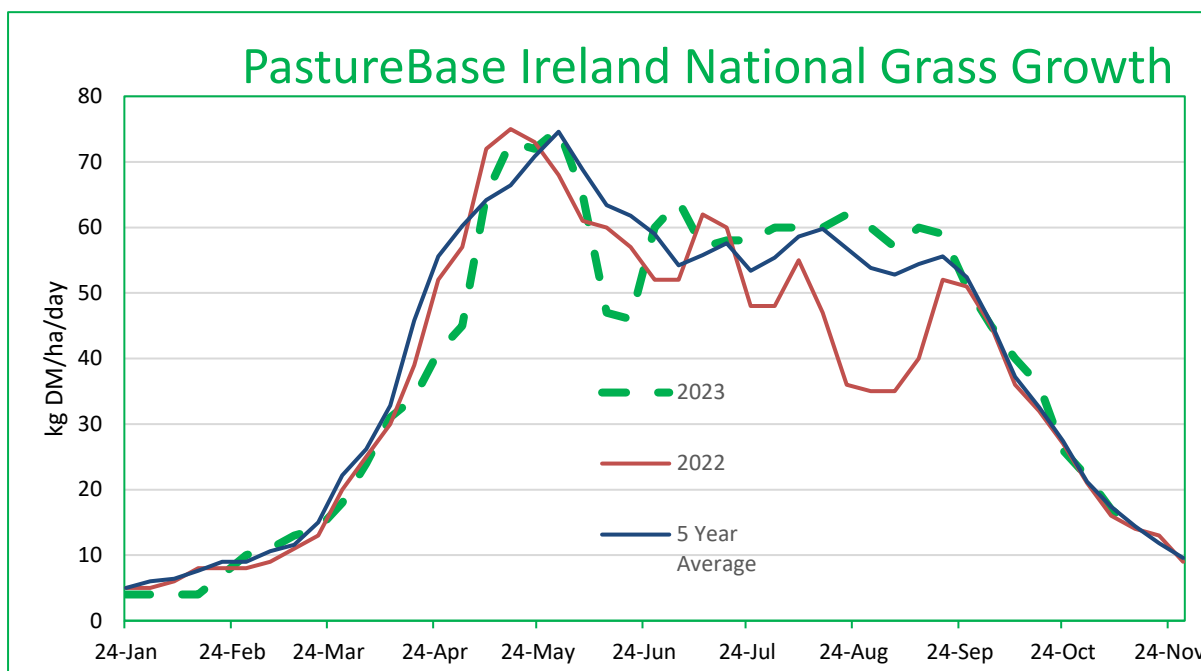
feed budget and how he uses the budget to map grazing and supplementation throughout the spring.

Feed budgeting – achieving target covers



Managing the “grass hungry” transition from the first to the second rotation

Managing the 2nd grazing rotation during April is crucial as cows on many spring calving herds approach their peak, both in terms of grass intakes & milk production. If you have a high 6 week calving rate % this puts additional pressure on the spring grass supply on your farm. In this session, we will be looking at “magic day” & the PastureBase national grass growth curve so how best you can map out 2nd rotation grazing so that cows are well fed & AFC is protected on the farm. We will also discuss some of the pitfalls of poor April grassland management especially the impact that feeding silage during April to fill a feed deficit can have on milk production and protein %.



Driving performance – getting grass allowances right in early summer

The number of people using PastureBase Ireland has increased significantly over the last number of years and this platform provides excellent information on the grass supply on Irish farms and how best to manage it.

Over the last 4 years, the difference in pasture DM production between the top 25% and the bottom 25% of PastureBase Ireland farmers was 4.9T DM/Ha which equates to enough feed (grass and grass silage) for one full livestock unit per hectare. There are a number of ways to increase the pasture DM production per paddock on your farm such as better soil fertility & better grass varieties, however driving the number of grazing per paddock every year also has a massive impact on pasture DM production. There are potentially 6 grazing rotations over the summer months so there is massive scope on Irish farms to manage these grazing's better. Getting allocations right and allowing animals excellent grass covers of 1400 Kg DM/Ha during the main grazing season will help to maximise the animal performance off grass & will allow farmers to reduce concentrate usage and take back control of feed costs on their farm.

GROWING 14 TON GRASS DM/Ha



Growth Period	Grass Grown/Rotn (kg/ha)	Rotn. Length (days)	No. of Rotations	When Does Grass Grow?
Feb to Mid Apr	1000	65	1	10%
Mid Apr to Mid Aug	1400	20	2-7	
Mid Aug to Mid Sep	1600	30	8	60%
Mid Sep to Mid Oct	1900	35	9	
Mid Oct to Mid Nov	1100	35	10	30%
Total Grass production/ha	14000	285	10	100%