

## Fodder Deficit Increasing

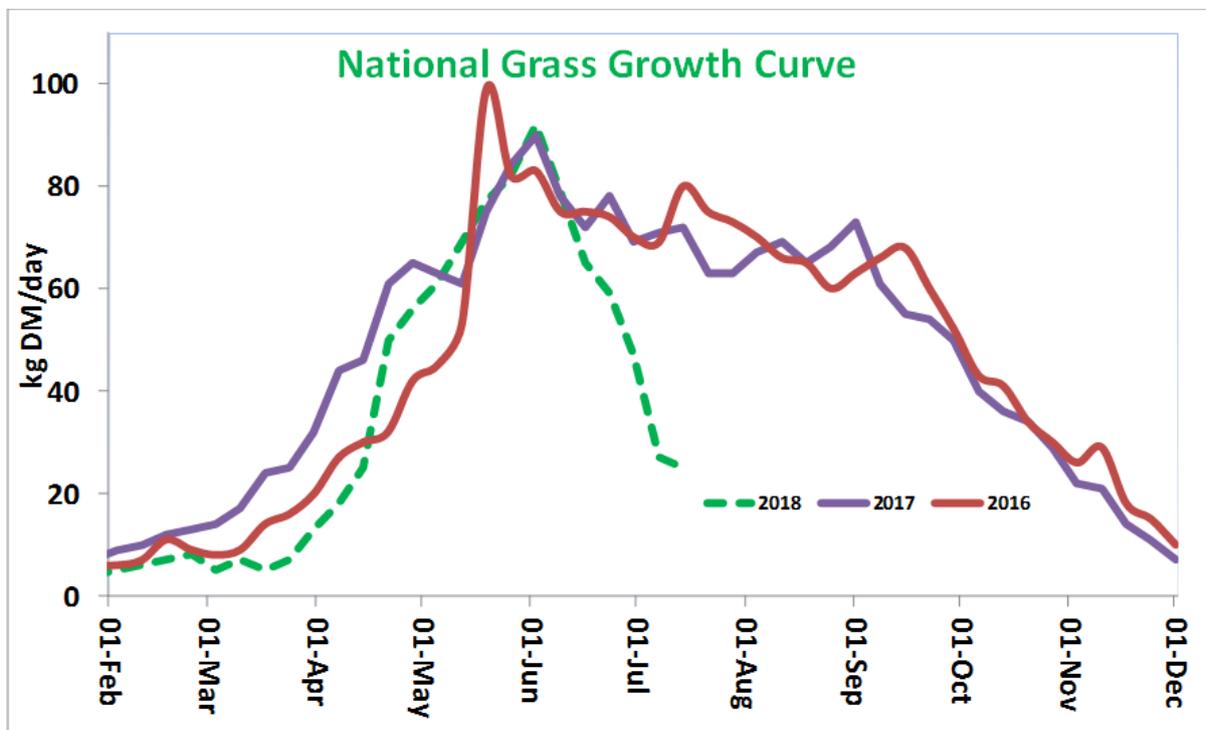
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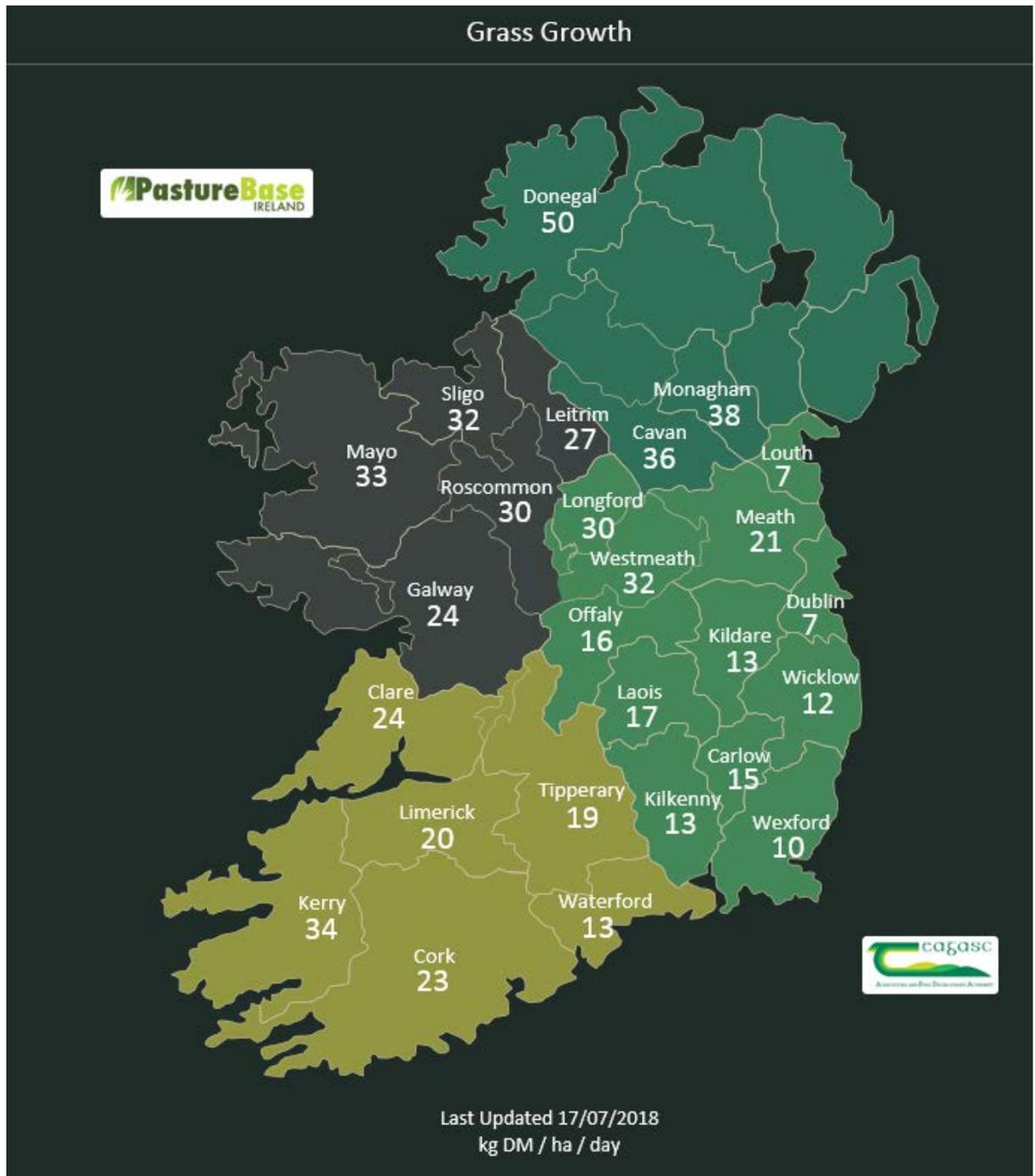
### 1. Fodder Census results

The Interagency Fodder Committee conducted a Fodder Census at the end of June / early July. The data for this survey was collected late June early July. Over 1,000 farmers from across a range of enterprises were surveyed across the country. Results of this survey in late June / early July showed a deficit of 18% nationally. The variation across regions varied from a 12% deficit in Roscommon, Longford, Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and up to a 30% deficit in parts of West Cork. The results have to be treated with some caution as conditions have deteriorated since the census date.

If we assume that half of the second cut has been consumed, Teagasc estimate that the national fodder deficit is now 28%. Average winter feed demand from the survey was 740 tonnes per farm. Therefore, a deficit of 28% equates to a deficit of 207 tonnes of silage per farm. The deficit ranges from 5 to 50% on individual farms.

Soil moisture deficits are very high ranging from around 50 to 60 mm in Ulster and Connacht, with values elsewhere running between 80 and 95 mm. As Figure 1 from Teagasc PastureBase Ireland illustrates grass growth has deteriorated to 25 kg DM / ha / day nationally, with Eastern, South East and Southern counties worst affected. In many areas of the South East, grass growth is 10 kg DM per ha or less. This has resulted in a significant gap between supply and demand; consequently significant quantities of silage have been fed on many farms as well as 2<sup>nd</sup> cut silage ground being grazed.





#### Next Steps

- a. **Take action now** – experience has taught us that taking early action offers a greater selection of options to bridge the gap between supply & demand. As the year progresses, the options become more limited. There is no single solution to filling that gap. It needs to be addressed from both sides – supply and demand -what stock numbers will you carry next winter and what additional feed can be sourced ?
- b. **Establish what the deficit is based on the assumption that you will be feeding forage for the next 4 weeks.** Is the deficit 20% or 50%? A deficit of 20% is relatively

easily managed over a whole winter by feeding additional meals, albeit at considerable cost. However if the deficit is 50%, very restricted forage and meals is an options but is more difficult to manage over an entire winter. Therefore if your deficit is 40-50%, forage should be sourced and / or demand reduced.

- c. Examine demand for feed on your farm – scan cows and sell empty cows, cull cows or late calving cows, consider putting heavy cattle on ad lib meals and finish them before the winter.
- d. If the deficit is big, i.e. 40-50%, it is important to bank some forage immediately. Options are limited but:
  - i. There is a window for whole crop cereal silage now and this is an opportunity for many farmers in cereal areas to build stocks.
  - ii. While stocks are limited there is some hay / straw to be bought.
  - iii. Consider forage crops which can be sown after what is likely to be an early harvest, or fields earmarked for reseeding, or sacrifice paddocks, that have been used for feeding silage.
- e. It is important to have fertiliser in the yard ready to spread when the rain comes. Previous droughts have shown us that high grass growth rates follow a drought period. If grass growth recovers through August some farms may be able to take a silage cut in early September. Make sure to capitalise on this by spreading adequate fertiliser.

Organise your finances to free up money to buy fertiliser for maximising Autumn grass growth and to buy feed for the winter.

The inter agency fodder group plan to conduct a second fodder census on 1<sup>st</sup> September.

The Teagasc helpline number for farmers seeking assistance is 087 7971377.

[Whole Crop Cereal Silage](#) (link to PDF)

[Forage Crops](#) (link to PDF)