

Grass10 campaign

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Summary

- Future growth in pasture based milk production in Ireland will depend on an effective grass-based system.
- The Grass10 campaign promotes sustainable grassland excellence.
- The objective of the campaign is to achieve 10 grazings/paddock per year utilising 10 t grass DM/ha.
- The number of grass measurements recorded on PastureBase Ireland by dairy farmers has increased significantly in 2019.

Introduction

Our competitive advantage in milk production can be explained by the low cost of grass relative to silage and concentrate feeds. Therefore, increased focus on grass production and efficient utilisation should be the main driver for improving efficiency and profitability of milk production. An analysis of farms completing both grassland measurement in PastureBase Ireland and a Profit Monitor demonstrated increased profit of €173/ha for every 1 t DM/ha increase in grass utilised. It should be noted that environmental sustainability (carbon footprint, nutrient use efficiency, etc.) is also improved by increased grass utilisation. Future growth in grass based milk production in Ireland will depend on an effective grass-based system. However, Irish farmers are not using grass to its potential and there is thus a need to (1) increase grass production and (2) ensure efficient utilisation of that grass on farms.

Current grazing performance on dairy farms

Currently, it is estimated that about 8 t grass DM/ha is utilised nationally on dairy farms. There are major improvements required in areas of pasture production and utilisation. Data from the best commercial grassland farms and research farms indicate that the current level of grass utilisation on dairy farms can be significantly increased (to greater than 10 t DM/ha utilised — i.e. 14 t DM/ha grown and 75% utilisation rate).

It is important to recognise that improvements in the level of soil fertility, grazing infrastructure and level of reseeding are crucial to achieve higher levels of grass production and utilisation. To achieve greater change in the level of grass utilised, farmers will need to improve their grazing management practices. This means regular measurement of grass supply, using specialised grassland focused software to analyse grass production, and implementing grazing management decisions. These are key drivers to increase grass production onfarm. New technologies are available which make grass cover assessment and the decision making process easier.

Grass10 campaign

Grass10 is a four-year campaign spearheaded by Teagasc to promote sustainable grassland excellence. The Grass10 campaign is playing an important part in increasing grass growth and utilisation on Irish grassland farms, thereby improving profitability at producer level and helping to ensure the long term sustainability of dairy production.

Objective

The objective of the campaign is to achieve 10 grazings/paddock per year utilising 10 t grass DM/ha. In order to achieve this objective, we need to achieve significant changes in on-farm practices, specifically:

- Improved grassland management skills.
- Improved soil fertility.
- Improved grazing infrastructure.
- Improved sward composition.
- Increased grass measurement and usage of PastureBase Ireland.

Grass10 grazing management training courses

To help improve knowledge of grazing and improve grazing skills, Teagasc, with the support of the Grass10 team, are providing 35 training courses to dairy farmers across the country to help farmers who want to learn more about grazing and enhance their grazing management skills and use of PastureBase Ireland, etc. Each course has a grazing coach who acts as a platform farm/farmer to help mentor course attendees. Across the country, there has been a significant increase in farmers measuring grass this year compared to 2018.

Grassland farmer of the year competition

Teagasc research indicates that grass utilisation can be increased significantly onfarm, and research shows a proven link between increased grass utilisation and increased profitability. In 2017, designated the Year of Sustainable Grassland, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, in collaboration with numerous industry stakeholders including Teagasc, launched a competition as part of the Grass10 initiative to find the Grassland Farmer of the Year. The objective of the Grassland Farmer of the Year Competition is to promote grassland excellence for all Irish livestock farmers. The winners of the Grassland Farmer of the Year incorporate all of the practices necessary to increase grass production and utilisation, including soil fertility management, sward renewal, grassland measurement and improving grazing infrastructure. They are true ambassadors for our grass based system.

