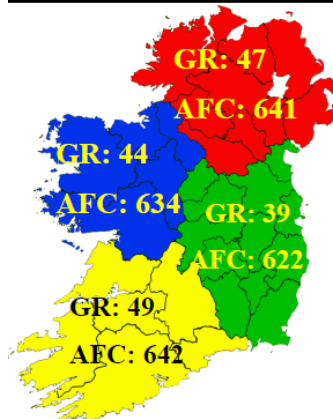


Mid-Season Grassland Management

By Michael Donoghue, B&T Dairy Adviser, Teagasc Galway/Clare

2020 will be remembered as the year of Covid 19 but also as a year of extremes for weather. For the winter and most of the spring it was very wet but the second half of the spring and summer so far have been extremely dry. While this has been very welcome on many fronts, it is starting to present some challenges from a grassland point of view.

Below: Covers in the Last 7 Days



Above are the Growth Rates, GR, and Average Farm Covers, AFC, from Pasturebase Ireland for the week ending 16th June 2020. These are average figures for the country, some farms are flying at the moment as they are heavier in nature and have been getting an odd shower, while other farms are burning up and growth rates are nearly at a standstill. But, on average, growth rates are running about 40% below normal for the last few weeks and are likely to be reduced for another couple of weeks assuming we start to get rain soon.

Broadly farms can be broken into 2 categories at the moment and below are some management tips to match:

- **Getting enough or nearly enough rain:**
 - Walk the farm to keep an eye on grass supply
 - Spread 20 units of N/acre/ month
 - Aim for 10 to 12 days grass ahead or 160 – 180Kg DM/LU for dairy cows
 - Rotation length 21 days
 - Reduce/stop feeding meal and/or silage
 - Once you have surplus grass, bale for silage
- **Not enough rain:**
 - Walk the farm to keep an eye on grass supply
 - If GR is < 20Kg, no N, if GR is 20-40Kg, spread ½ rate, if GR >40Kg, normal rate
 - Rotation length 25 days
 - Don't wipe the farm out, keep AFC >500Kg
 - Reduce farm demand, increase grazing area, feed meal and/or silage, sell stock

Above are some very important short term measures that will need to be taken to maintain grass quantity and quality on farms in the weeks ahead. The other longer term issue will be feed stocks for the winter. First cuts were great quality but lighter than normal, second cuts are unlikely to be very

heavy and no surpluses are been taken at present. So decisions will need to be taken early with a view to the winter ahead too. Never a dull moment in the world of farming.