

# Four years in: A review of the Grass10 campaign

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**G**rass-based systems of milk and meat production have a sustainable, green and high-quality image world. They are also cost-effective. Ireland's comparative advantage in milk and meat production can be explained by the relative cost of grass, silage and concentrate feeds, which are estimated at 7c, 15c and 30c per kg.

Teagasc analysis has indicated that net profit per hectare is increased by €173/ha for each additional tonne of grass DM utilised on Irish dairy farms, with the corresponding figure for drystock farms being in the region of €105/ha.

Teagasc launched a four-year Grass10 campaign (2017-2020) to promote sustainable grassland excellence on Irish dairy, beef and sheep farms.

The Grass10 partners are Grassland Agro, AIB, FBD, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the *Irish Farmers Journal*. The Grass10 programme also works closely with Teagasc's Grassland Science Department.

The primary objective of the Grass10 Campaign is to increase the

number of Irish farmers utilising 10t of grass DM/ha/year using 10 grazings per paddock.

A detailed review of the first four years of the programme is available at <https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2021/Grass10-Report-2017--2020php>.

## Practice changes

The programme identified five key priorities:

- **Grazing infrastructure** — improve paddock layout, water systems and farm roadways.
- **Soil fertility** — improve soil pH, P and K.
- **Reseeding** — reseed poorly performing paddocks.
- **PastureBase Ireland (PBI)** — increase both the number of farmers using the programme and the number of measurements taken per farm.
- **Grassland management skills** — improve the grassland management skills of farmers.

## PastureBase Ireland measurements

The number of farmers regularly measuring pasture must increase if grassland management is to improve. Regular Grass10 meetings on farms have helped to train farmers to measure grass and use PBI.

The number of farmers now recording 20 or more grass measurements and using PBI to manage grass on their farms has increased by over



100% since the Grass10 campaign began (see Table 1).

The Teagasc National Farm Survey data indicates that grass utilisation per ha increased by 0.3t (7.7t-8.0t of DM/ha) on dairy farms, while it remained static at 5.9t on drystock farms over the last few years. This corresponds to the annual grass production of 10.7t and 7.9t of DM/ha on dairy and drystock farms, respectively, in 2019.

On dairy farms where PBI is used, an average of 13.6t of DM/ha grass was grown in 2019. This suggests that there is still significant potential to grow more grass on the average dairy farm. There was a significant improvement in soil fertility over the period as well. About 20% of soil samples currently tested are at optimal soil fertility, compared to 10% at the start of the Grass10 campaign.

## Grass10 courses

About 45 training courses have been delivered to farmers over the last two years. The courses were held on farms using the concept of the 'Grazing Coach'. Grass course members met at the same farm each month and monitored grazing decisions and performance throughout the year.

The Grazing Coach selected is a farmer who wants to learn, but has the potential to improve grass produc-

**Table 1:** Number of dairy and drystock farms who have completed 20 or more grass measurements on PBI over the 2016-2020 period

Year	Dairy farms	Drystock farms	Total
2020	1623	116	1739
2019	1014	106	1120
2018	731	93	824
2017	739	70	809
2016	659	49	708



## Grassland Farmer of the Year competition

In 2017, the Grassland Farmer of the Year competition was launched as part of the Grass10 campaign. This coincided with the Year of Sustainable Grassland, supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and was held in collaboration with the other Grass10 stakeholders.



Caroline Walsh from Ballinascarthy, Co Cork, is the current Grassland Farmer of the Year. Previous winners include Eddie and Denis O'Donnell, Golden, Tipperary, John MacNamara, Hospital, Limerick and Bryan Daniels, Kilmoganny, Kilkenny.

tion and grazing efficiency on their own farm. John Fox, a dairy farmer in Glenroe, Co Limerick, who milks 80 cows, talks about his experience:

“I always like to have cows out grazing and get a lot of satisfaction from it. However, I felt I could do it better. The first thing I noticed from being part of the Grass10 course was that I didn't have to top paddocks anymore after grazing.

“I gained confidence in using PastureBase Ireland figures and the grass wedge, and this enabled me take out paddocks that are too strong for grazing, but at same time, to graze the right covers of grass.

“This improved milk solids, because I was entering the paddock at the right time. Walking the farm and doing the measurements has allowed me to have better grass for my cows, but I

also grew more grass on the farm.”

### Weekly Grass10 newsletter

The Grass10 newsletter is delivered to over 1,500 industry stakeholders and 4,000 PastureBase Ireland users weekly. It is produced every Tuesday and takes into account the grass measurements taken by grassland farmers and fed into PastureBase Ireland.

The newsletter includes predicted grass growth for the upcoming week. Farmers' daily grass management decisions are of huge importance to ensure good-quality feed availability for the animals during the grazing season. Being able to predict grass growth for the following week at farm level would help farmers to better anticipate variations in grass growth. The Moorepark St Gilles Grass

Growth model is a dynamic computer

model working at farm and paddock level. It takes into account soil type, weather and the grazing management practices when predicting farm grass growth.

### Social Media

Grass10 has been present on Twitter since the campaign started, under the Twitter handle @TeagascGrass10. This platform is used as a communication tool for all Grass10 messages, events, publications, videos and the Grass10 newsletter. The page works closely with the PastureBase Ireland account.

• Grass10 wishes to acknowledge the support of our industry stakeholders in the Grass10 campaign.

### Grass10 in 2021

The Teagasc Grass10 team, along with their colleagues in the local advisory offices, have commenced the 2021 series of Grass10 grazing courses. Currently held online, on-farm practical experience with advisors/specialists and farmer coaches will resume when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

If you want to:

- Grow and utilise more grass and

extend the grazing season through practical on-farm training.

- Build your capacity and confidence to implement better grazing techniques, measure grass, and use PastureBase reports to make grazing decisions.
- Take part in a challenging discussion group with like-minded farmers.
- Gain encouragement and support from advisors and farmers to help you to stay focused and make progress.

- Improve the nutrient use efficiency on your farm.

- Increase your ability to meet your derogation requirements through grass measuring.

Then a Grass10 course is for you!

To join a Grass10 course, apply online at <https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/grassland/grass10/grazing-courses/> or contact your local Teagasc advisor.