

James Mullane and Michéal Kelly.



Top management in Tipp

Using PastureBase Ireland (PBI) to maximise grassland management in the premier county

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In 2017, dairy farmer Michéal Kelly had a health scare that changed how he looked at and managed his farm. "I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, cancer in my lymphatic system. From May to December 2017, I went through chemotherapy and radiotherapy. So how did this help me? It made me take a step back and see how I could manage my farm and my grass more efficiently and effectively.

"I have a really good friend who walked my farm every Monday and did my weekly grass measurements. Some days I was able to go with him; other days I was laid up due to the after effects of the chemotherapy. There were days in the hospital when I would log into Glanbia Connect and

Table 1: 2020 physical performance

Cow numbers	115
Total area farmed	67
Milking platform hectares	40
Milk solids production per cow	504kg
Milk solids production per hectare	1,411kg
Tonnes of grass grown per hectare	13.7t
Supplement fed per cow	800kg
Chemical nitrogen fertiliser usage	165kg

PBI, and I knew exactly what was going on and could make decisions. This gave me confidence and control over my grass management."

Michéal farms three miles from Clonmel in the townland of Ballyvaughan. Tipperary's iconic Slievenamon forms the backdrop for the farm. On a 40ha milking platform he milks 115 cows. Dairy replacements are reared on a newly leased 27ha block.

Michéal attended Kildalton Agricultural College to earn his Green Certificate in 1999 to 2000 before starting his full-time farming career in 2002 alongside his father Jerry, who also worked off-farm. Michéal is married to Serena and they have five children: Emma (20), Sean (10), Darragh (eight), Aoibhinn (four) and Tadgh (one).

When did you start focusing on grass?

"I got interested in grass management as far back as 2011 through my discus-

sion group, "Slievenamon". I started measuring by cutting out a square of grass with a clippers and I now "eye ball" the paddocks.

Since quotas were abolished in 2015 Michéal has been steadily increasing cow numbers while keeping a close eye on grass performance. 2020 has been his best year yet.

"I walked the farm 53 times during the year, and I find that the PBI Grass app makes grass budgeting so much easier."

Why did you start measuring grass?

"I feel my investment in cow genetics will be worthless if I am not feeding the best feed. Without measuring I would lose a lot of money from poorer production and a higher meal bill. It is also important not to be going into heavy covers in the summer and wondering: 'why are my cows not milking better?' On the other hand it's also vital to not run out of grass."

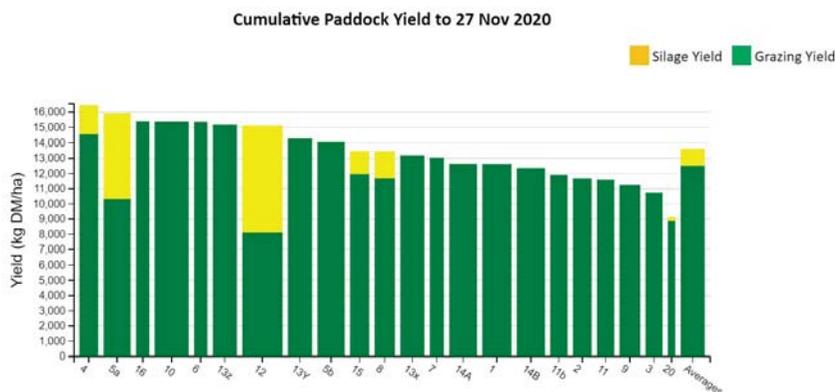
Reaping the rewards: what can we see from Michéal's data?

In 2020, Michéal's farm grew 13.7t of grass dry matter per hectare while also achieving 8.6 grazings and 0.4 cuts of silage per paddock. This exceptional performance is 1.1t/ha above 2019. In 2019 Michéal achieved only seven grazings per paddock. This shows the importance of getting as many grazings from each paddock as possible.

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Figure 1: 2020 annual tonnage report for Michéal's farm



Another key performance indicator is the average pre-grazing yield across the whole year. Ideally, this figure should be between 1,400kg and 1,600kg DM/ha. Michéal's data shows the pre-grazing yield averaging 1,470kg DM/ha. His cows are grazing very high-quality grass and producing high-quality milk solids.

On some farms which are growing high volumes of grass the average pre-grazing yield is too high, at more than 1,800kg DM/ha.

Building on the information: why use PastureBase Ireland?

"The amount of data I have recorded on PastureBase Ireland (PBI) is increasing year on year," says Michéal. "At the beginning, grass cover and graze dates were the only data I recorded. Now this is being complemented with milk information coming from Glanbia after every collection, the most recent soil test results, and fertiliser/slurry applications.

"In the past, I could tell you the total fertiliser I purchased and how much it cost but I could never tell you how much N, P and K that I had applied on

each paddock. All this information is in PBI now and it is helping me make day-to-day decisions."

Over the last 12 months, there has been a big focus on reporting in PBI. This has resulted in the creation of a number of new reports: farm cover, farm summary and the grass report. All these reports can be found in the "Reports" section on the website. Data can be extracted quicker and easier.

Conclusion: what advice can you give to farmers around grass measuring?

"I think all farmers need to stop

looking for excuses about why they don't measure grass up and look at all the advantages. Take grass out of my system, I wouldn't be dairy farming. Grass is around so long that we are taking it for granted. In any other business, do you think companies do not measure their inputs? Farming should be no different!"

To me, the most important job on my farm is to ensure that the cows are milked. This is closely followed by weekly grass measurements. When you measure your grass you can manage it."

Grass10 Grazing Courses 2021

The courses are for Dairy, Beef and Sheep farmers around the country who want to increase grass utilised, reduce input costs and improve the profitability on their farm.

Why would this course benefit you?

- Develop your knowledge of grazing management to grow and utilise more grass and to extend the grazing season with practical on farm training
- Build capacity and confidence to; implement better grazing techniques, measure grass, and use PastureBase reports to make grazing decisions
- Honest and open discussion group with other like-minded farmers
- Encourage and support from advisors and farmers to help you to stay focused and make progress
- Improve the Nutrient Use Efficiency on your farm
- Help you to meet your derogation requirements through grass measuring

Delivery:

- On-farm Practical Experience with Advisors/Specialists & Farmer Coaches
- Meet 8-10 times per year

For more information visit:

www.teagasc.ie/grazingcourses

or scan the QR code with your phone camera



SCAN ME



"We started milking cows in 2014 and we had to learn a lot of new skills. One of the most beneficial skills we learned was grassland management."

Mike Bermingham,
Dairy Category Winner
Grassland Farmer of the Year 2019



"Grass management is key to a simplified and successful suckler and beef farm. Grass measurement is the next step for farmers to take."

Trevor Boland,
Suckler Category Winner
Grassland Farmer of the Year 2019



"Grass measurement has been of great benefit to me as I improved the productivity and profitability of my farm over the last few years."

John O'Connell,
Sheep Category Winner
Grassland Farmer of the Year 2019



Jerry, Serena, Tadgh and Michéal Kelly with Slievenamon in the background.

Grass10 groups

There are 40+ Grass10 discussion groups with more coming on stream in 2021. Michéal Kelly joined the Clonmel/Carrick-on-Suir Grass10 group in 2019 and is one of 23 members who hail from Clonmel, Ballyneale, Grangemockler, Mullinahone, Newcastle and Poulmucka. John Murray, Ballinderry, Carrick-on-Suir, was the host farmer in 2019.

The group was set up and facilitated by Mícheál O'Leary (PastureBase Ireland) and James Mullane (local Teagasc dairy advisor). This was the beginning of the grass journey for Michéal Kelly. "Looking back at it now I learnt a lot from going to John Murray's farm each month.

"This really opened my eyes to the benefits of early spring grazing and grazing down to 4cm. It made me realise I needed to up my game, so spring grazing was an area I really focused on in 2020.

"A good bit of planning was needed and often 10,000 steps was hit before breakfast each morning, putting up a back fence, creating spur roads and

allocating three-hour grazings. But the reward was well worth it by producing more kilo of milk solids per cow and lower feed costs. It also highlighted to me that some roadways need to be extended/constructed in the future to maximise the number of days at grass."

“ It made me realise I needed to up my game, so spring grazing was an area I really focused on in 2020

Due to COVID-19, we were restricted from holding some meetings and we used Zoom and WhatsApp instead. It is great to share advice from the lads from time to time."

Over 3,500 farmers use PastureBase Ireland, the grassland management tool which is available to all Teagasc clients. If you would like further information on PastureBase Ireland please contact us by email support@pbi.ie or 046-9200965. Alternatively, contact your local Teagasc office for more information.

99%
of farmers who participated in a Grass10 Grazing Course would recommend it to another farmer

90%
of participant farmers changed some aspect of their farm management based on what they learnt from the course

73%
of farmers say that it was very easy or easy to apply the training they learnt from the Grass10 Grazing course

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