

Summer grassland management

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The Grass10 team issues a weekly bulletin by email for interested farmers. The recent messages from the team centre on maintaining

mid-summer grass quality. This is proving challenging on farms at present because of the prevailing weather conditions and grass has been tending to head out over the past month. According to the team, restoring quality is now the priority on farms and they identified the following tips to help farmers to get back on track:

- take bales from paddocks with heavier covers, especially those under grazed (over 4cm) on the last rotation;
- nail grazing residuals by keeping pre-grazing yields at 1,400kg DM/ha and cover/LU at 160-

180kg DM/LU, or 12-14 days ahead;

- check rotation length on your PastureBase data (aim for 15-18 days);
- keep walking the farm every five days during high growth; and,
- target pre-grazing yields of 1,200-1,300kg DM/ha to achieve better cleanouts.

Farmer users of PastureBase Ireland can now avail of an online nitrogen (N) planner tool. This allows farmers to allocate and budget their N allowance through the grazing season.

According to Micheál O'Leary of the PastureBase team: "This will help stop excess nitrogen fertiliser being applied to grassland over and above the recommended rate".

Micheál explains how to use the tool in a newly released support video accessed at the following link: <http://bit.ly/NPlanner>.

Ending the breeding season



Establish a date on which to end the breeding season this year.

Nationally almost 400,000 'spring-calving' cows calve in the months of April, May and June. Almost as many calve in May and June as in April.

This is far too many and costing Irish dairy farmers millions of Euro annually.

No more than 10% of your spring-calving cows should calve during this part of the year and all of these should calve in April. Herds with a very spread out calving pattern generally can't afford to cease milking over the coming winter.

Such patterns lead to higher-cost and lower-profit systems of milk production, so the additional margin generated this winter may be required by the farming family.

Farmers can however take the following steps to correct a spread-out calving pattern:

- establish a date on which to end the breeding season this year – finishing on July 20 will ensure that the last calving occurs in April next year – if you continue to breed until later in the year,

you will have later-calving cows and the cycle will start all over again;

- where the calving pattern is spread out, it may be difficult to stop milking altogether for this winter, so accept that this winter you will continue to milk the late calvers;
- bring in extra home reared or buy in suitable early spring-calving replacement heifers for next year – they will produce as much milk in the coming year as a late calver and are certainly more likely to remain in the herd, calving in early spring in future years; and,
- next spring either cull this year's late calvers from the parlour or, if accommodation and forage is available, finish them off grass next summer.

A more detailed version of this summary is presented in the current edition of *Today's Farm*.

Heifer weights



Underweight heifers need special attention to ensure that they reach the target liveweight for breeding and calving.

Having replacement heifers at the correct weight for their age at six months old is critical to their long-term future in the dairy herd. Weanling and yearling heifers born around February 1 should be 30% and 70%, respectively, of their mature body weight on August 1 if they're to be successfully calved at two years of age. So assuming a mature weight of 580kg, this equates to approximately 175kg for the weanling, and at least 406kg for the in-calf heifer. Weighing this month will allow you to accurately identify the lighter animals for

priority grazing and supplementation to ensure that they catch up with their heavier counterparts before the winter. An underweight heifer is one that is approximately 5% lighter than the target, so weanlings weighing less than 165kg and in-calf heifers weighing less than 385kg need special attention now to ensure that they reach the target liveweight for breeding and calving respectively. It's important to remember that these are minimum weights rather than average weights for the group.

Summer mastitis

Summer mastitis (caused by the bacterium *Trueperella pyogenes*), is an acute disease occurring in dry cows and in-calf heifers. Because it is spread by flies, it is most often seen during the summer. Clinical signs of the disease include stiffness when walking and a swollen painful teat or udder. Toxins produced by the bacteria can cause septicaemia and result in lethargy, abortion and even death of the infected animal.

Reduce the incidence of the disease by having good fly control measures in place (pour-ons, Stockholm tar on the udder). Where possible avoid grazing stock on fields with a history of summer mastitis incidences (typically low-lying areas or areas with a high density of trees where the flies tend to concentrate). Observe animals on a regular basis and once identified, treat affected stock promptly.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Farm Safety Week



July is the most dangerous month of the year, with the highest levels of farm workplace deaths based on past records. Let us change this trend in 2021. While

many farming activities take place in July, tractor and machinery work and children on the farm are particular concerns. Farm Safety Week starts on Monday July 19 when the official launch occurs. Daily themes are as follows: Tuesday – Dying to get the job done? Tiredness can kill; Wednesday –

Farm safety may not cost the Earth but not doing it may cost you your life; Thursday – Protecting the public; and, Friday – Your health, your safety, your choice. Farm Safety Week is a collaboration between the farm safety partnerships of the UK (www.yellowwellies.org) and Ireland. The daily themes reflect the fact that safety to a large extent is within our own controls. Follow Farm Safety Week messages in the media. The hashtag for the week is #FarmSafetyWeek.

#FarmSafetyWeek

Climate actions for July

If you have oversown clover, graze low covers (1,000 kg DM/ha)

On grass clover swards, reduce N fertiliser applied (half rate)



Apply thick slurry or a protected urea compound with K included to replace the K removed by silage



Check your slurry storage availability and if it's inadequate, make a plan



Ask your contractor to spread slurry using LESS equipment

Review your fertiliser plan – rectify low P and K index soils and apply lime