

# DAIRY

April 2023

## Top five tips for April

Edited by

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1. Weigh your bulling heifers – if you are using sexed semen on a synchronisation protocol on your heifers, make sure the heifers are on target weight and cycling to improve conception rates. Heifers should be 65% of mature body weight at bulling.
2. As we move into midseason grazing management, it is important the herd is fed properly during peak milk and breeding season. Where possible, paddock graze the cows in 36-hour paddocks to ensure maximum feeding of the herd and grass growth. 100 cows require a 2ha paddock for three grazings.
3. Include sulphur in your fertiliser regime. Most farms will require 15-20 units of sulphur/acre spread over three to four applications.
4. Select your cows for dairy AI breeding. Selecting from your better cows will improve genetics. Pick high Dairy Beef Index (DBI) bulls with good carcass traits for use on the remainder of the herd.
5. Select paddocks that are suitable for clover incorporation. These paddocks should have high soil fertility and lime status. Incorporating clover early and managing it thereafter allows for a higher success rate.

## Think clover this April

Given the current crisis in the fertiliser market and implications for fertiliser use on farms from the EU Farm to Fork strategy, the urgency to establish clover and to reduce chemical nitrogen (N)

fertiliser use is now here.

Given the high forage quality of the clover plant, there is a benefit to cow performance (higher yield of milk solids). Clover also provides the

opportunity to improve the environmental footprint of our milk production systems. There is, however, a clear challenge to ensuring

that grass clover swards are established and persist on commercial grassland farms. Come along to our clover events in April for more detail.



## Clover Farm Walks

The Teagasc Grass10 & Clover150 team, along with Teagasc Grassland Researchers and the Teagasc advisory team will run a series of farm walks. Topics to be discussed include; the establishment and management of white & red clover and fertiliser application strategies to maintain clover and pasture production



Date	Location	Time
3 April	Tom O'Connell, Inniscarra, Co. Cork P31 KX93	11am
4 April	Teagasc Clonakilty Agricultural College, Co. Cork P85 AX52	11am
4 April	Mark Lonergan, Cashel, Co. Tipperary E25 NC42	11am
5 April	Calf to Beef System, Teagasc, Johnstown Castle Y35 HK54	11am
5 April	Michael Ahern, Ballyduff, Co. Waterford P51 X965	11am
6 April	Joe Carroll, Ballyheigue, Co. Kerry V92 XN67	11am
6 April	Thomas & David Fennelly, Portarlinton, Co. Laois R32 YA21	11am
12 April	Peter Robinson, Multyfarnham, Co. Westmeath N91 X279	11am
12 April	Grange Suckler System, Teagasc Grange, Co. Meath C15 PW93	11am
13 April	O'Dea Farm, Killeely, Co. Limerick V94 KX77	11am
13 April	Oisín Gallen, Ramelton, Co. Donegal F92 DE48	11am
14 April	Killian Brennan, Kilcogy, Co. Cavan N39 YY81	11am
18 April	Sheep Unit, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway H65 R718	11am

Book your ticket for these events at [www.teagasc.ie/cloverwalks](http://www.teagasc.ie/cloverwalks) or scan the QR code  
*Registration is advised but not essential*



## Feeding for fertility this breeding season

This spring was a game of two halves, in terms of herd feeding management. The good weather in February saw cows out to grass and intakes were good overall. Things were a bit more challenging in March due to bad weather; however, the consensus among many discussion groups has been that cows have emerged from the first round in relatively good condition. As we move closer to the start of breeding, we need to make sure we continue to set up the herd for good pregnancy rates.

- **Body condition score (BCS):** BCS at breeding should be 2.75 plus, to improve conception rates. What if some cows are still well below target at the start of breeding? It will take a couple of months to fix very thin milking cows by feeding 2-3kg extra meal. Short-term improvements in conception rate will be minimal. If there are thin or non-cycling cows in the herd that are due for breeding, milking once-a-day for six weeks can boost fertility.
- **High EBI cows (€180+):** these cows will maintain BCS across a range of diets, explaining in part why their fertility is better. Use high-Economic Breeding Index (EBI) bulls (target €300+) to make feeding for BCS simpler in the long term. The BCS response to extra feed is poor in the short term for lower-EBI herds.
- **Energy intake:** this drives milk solids, maintains BCS, and improves fertility. Ensure that the herd is grazing the best quality grass possible (1,400kg covers, three leaf stage). Watch residuals (target 4-4.5cm) to make sure cows are cleaning out paddocks but not being pinched on intake. Supplement deficits in grass in good time. Well-fed herds will be eating 18-19kg DM at grass in April.



*February-calved cow in ideal body condition pre breeding in April.*

- **Protein in the diet:** high quality pasture contains a high level of crude protein N, which milking cows use with feed energy to make milk protein. Surplus diet N may cause elevated milk urea levels; however, under good management, bulk milk urea does not explain much difference in fertility between herds. Apply fertiliser N in small-and-often batches during the breeding season. Do not overload fertiliser N under drought conditions, and feed high energy 14% crude protein rations at grass to control any risk.
- **Mineral deficiencies:** phosphorus (P) deficiency can be an underlying cause of low conception rate. If cows are licking stones, exhibiting depraved appetite, etc., it is important to act early. Blood test 7-10% of the herd and speak to your Teagasc advisor on results. You may need to add extra P to water, as mineral blocks or in-ration boluses will not correct a P issue. Trace minerals (copper, cobalt, iodine, selenium, manganese and zinc) are needed in tiny quantities, but can affect fertility if lacking in the diet. Feeding minerals above requirements is expensive and will not boost fertility where no deficiency exists. The problems of thin cows, poor heat detection and bad genetics are usually much more important.

## Managing the second grazing rotation

### April grazing targets

Many farms had a very fast start to grazing this spring due to good weather in February, but a wet March put the brakes on for many. The second rotation should begin when the grass is almost right for grazing, i.e., 1,100-1,200kg DM/ha. It is important to walk the farm and keep an eye on the first three to four paddocks that were grazed this spring. Try to target a cover of about 150-160kg DM/cow on the farm at the start of the second round. The farm cover cannot fall below 550-600kg DM/ha (four cows per ha multiplied by 150-160kg per cow = 600-

640kg average farm cover (AFC)).

April is also the clean-out month. Grass will start turning reproductive from late April/early May. Getting the sward cleaned before this process starts is important. Some paddocks were under grazed this spring due to poor conditions, so April offers the opportunity to correct this. The task is made easier by entering the right cover of grass and by starting the second rotation on time. If the first paddocks grazed are ready before the first round is finished, you should skip the last few paddocks and commence round two.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Mind your sight

Loss of sight is a major disability. An ophthalmic physician has recently drawn attention to the dangers of using hydrated lime (builders' lime) on eye sight. This material is used to lime cubicles, and for white washing and building work. If this material enters the eye, it can cause the lens to go opaque or white, preventing vision. Prevent lime's entry into the eye by wearing eye protection. If it does enter the eye, perform first aid by continuously washing out your eye for 10 minutes with water flowing from a pipe (e.g., shower pipe) while holding your eyelids open. Another major cause of sight loss is puncture by a thorn, which injects a toxin into the eye. The eye has a limited blood supply, so it has



*Protect your eyes.*

reduced capacity to fight infection. Getting metal into the eye during repair or workshop activities is another major hazard. Protect your eyes and always seek medical attention following eye injury.

