

Managing the herd in current weather conditions

Webinar Questions and Answers

Grazing Management

What should people be doing right now to get going?

People generally wait for a dry period to get started, but these periods haven't come this year. On most farms, there are areas where you have to take any chance available. Go to these areas first. Don't react to poor grazing in first couple days. You have to stick at it for a period of time. Limit the time the cows are on the paddock when conditions are difficult. Accept it will not always be perfect.

How should paddocks at the start of the 2nd rotation that were damaged in the 1st rotation be dealt with to avoid further damage?

Mix and match between 1st and 2nd rotation. Don't fully finish 1st rotation before starting 2nd rotation. Keep some of the 1st rotation paddocks in reserve to give yourself options. Don't put yourself in the position where you have no choice but to graze these damaged paddocks in poor conditions.

Is it worse to damage high covers versus low covers?

Not really an issue – but accept that you are not going to graze out very tight in wet conditions. Grass quality can be fixed by mowing in a later round. It is generally easier however to limit damage on lighter covers if limited grazing time is practiced,

Where silage ground can be grazed, should it be grazed by heifers or closed at this stage?

At this stage, it would be better to close it for silage if there is somewhere else available for heifers to graze. Aim for a mid-May cut.

In the delayed turnout trials did cow performance continue to suffer after they went to grass?

There was a lag phase but after about 3 weeks, the groups were back on par with each other. The important point here though is that grass quality was repaired in April and May. How? By taking out heavy covers as bales in late April and bringing that area into the grazing rotation. It was not possible to finish the first normal rotation with such late turnout- trying to do so would have affected cow performance.

Where 1st rotation is near completion and grass supply or grazing conditions are poor what should be done?

Start the 2nd round as planned. Divide up grazing area to give a 25 day rotation and fill the gap with other feeds until growth rates increase to sufficient levels. Be very careful not to allow farm cover to

drop too low in these situations (min 550 to 600 DM/ha). It is important to ensure cow's diet has at least 10 to 11 kg of forage DM (Grass & Silage)

Feed Management

Should you be on a higher protein nut when cows are indoors?

Energy is normally the limiting factor. An 18% nut would be normal when cows are indoors fulltime. However, we don't really want to be in the situation where the bin is still half full of an 18% nut and cows are back out grazing. Wouldn't be concerned in the short term feeding 16% nut while indoors. Feeding an 18% nut with grass in the diet has the potential to strip condition off of cows. Meet the cow's energy requirement indoors by making sure supplementation rates are adequate.

Is a midday feed justified if only in the odd day and getting to grass most days?

It works for situations where forage supplies are getting very tight and if ground conditions mean, we will not get out to grass on a day-to-day basis. Or indeed if cows are on very poor quality silage (67 DMD or less). If getting to grass most days it is probably not necessary. Increase meal fed in parlour to 6 kg on the days you do not get to grass and feed 2kg of a midday straight if needed.

Should once a day milking be considered to save feed and cow condition?

There is no benefit to cow condition from OAD if cutting back feed allowances to save feed stocks. To save BCS on cows OAD needs to be used in conjunction with normal feed allowances. Cutting feed and going OAD could drop solids output by 30% plus.

Is 40% forage sufficient in the cow's diet where silage stocks are tight?

No. 40% is too low. Need to ensure the cow is getting 10 to 11 kg DM from forage sources. If silage stocks are very tight, feed a high fibre stretcher like hulls, beet pulp or PKE

Should cows and heifers receive different feeding rates?

Probably little benefit in practice and will only further complicate the system. It is worth running a separate colostrum group for 4 to 5 days however so that fresh cows don't get fed high rates of meal too soon after calving.

How should heifers be managed where they haven't been out grazing?

Assess weights to see are they on target. Ideally get them out to grass now. Ration may need to remain in the diet where weights are behind target. 2kg of high protein concentrate needed on average quality silage.

Should heifers remain indoor for breeding at this stage?

Should be no issue putting them out to grass if they will be out for 2 weeks prebreeding.

Where heifers have remained indoors is sexed semen still an option?

If weights are on target sexed semen should be ok. Ideally get them out to grass before breeding season. Avoid sexed semen if underweight.

Fertiliser Management

Should fertiliser be blanket spread or applied following grazing?

Preferable to blanket spread now as this will substantially increase regrowth rates. Particularly important to blanket spread in situations where no fertiliser has been applied yet this year.

Should fertiliser be applied to heavy grass covers?

Yes. Very important to increase regrowths.

Can slurry still be applied to grazing paddocks?

Where storage is tight some watery slurry can be applied by LESS to grazing paddocks if covers are below 800 kgDM/ha. Ensure application rate does not exceed 2000 gallons per acre.

Should P fertiliser be applied now to help the recovery of damaged paddocks?

Where a P allowance is available on farm target this to areas of the farm that have grazing damage or low P indexes now. Where there is no P allowance available watery slurry or parlour washings could be applied at a rate of 2000 gallons per acre if conditions allow.

Is there any advantage to using 29-0-14 on damaged ground?

Not really, the K won't actually increase tillering capacity. P is required for this.

Why should sulphur be included in fertiliser applications?

Particularly important on drier, free draining soils. Has the potential to increase cumulative grass yield by between 1 and 1.5 t/ha over the course of the year. Be careful not to over-use sulphur as this can lead to copper issues in cattle.

How much sulphur is recommended on dry sandy ground?

20 to 25 kg/ha total for the year. Applied from April to mid July.

Should 1st cut silage cutting date be delayed to allow crops to bulk up to help replenish silage stocks?

No. While delaying cutting dates will increase 1st cut yield, it will reduce the yield of subsequent cuts resulting in lower overall production. Quality of the 1st cut will also be reduced. Target cutting date of mid to late May (ideally before May 25th).

Should fertiliser applications for 1st cut be split at this stage?

Often done in other years, however the first split is usually applied in March. At this stage it would be better not to split to avoid delaying cutting date.

Can slurry still be applied to silage swards where covers are already heavy?

No, the risk of damaging the sward and bringing the slurry back in with the crop are too great. Meet the fertiliser requirements with chemical fertiliser instead.

How much fertiliser N (including slurry) should be applied for 1st cut silage?

100 to 110 kg N/ha (80 to 90 units/acre)

How long after applying 90 units of nitrogen will the silage crop be safe to cut?

Rule of thumb is 2 units per day – therefore 45 days required to use up 90 units of N

How much N should be applied to silage ground that already has a very high cover on it?

Estimate cutting date and use the principle of 2 units N per day to calculate appropriate application rate.

How much fertiliser P is required for 1st cut silage?

3 kg/t DM/ha. A 6 t/ha crop requires 18 kg P/ha (15 units/acre) to replace crop offtake.

Where a farm has no P allowance and slurry can't be applied at this stage to the silage ground what should farmers do?

Use chemical fertiliser to supply N, K & S requirements, and apply slurry after cutting to top up P levels.

Where slurry can't be applied to silage ground at this stage, what rate of chemical K can be applied?

Apply at a rate of 20 to 25 kg K/t DM/ha. Where silage K levels are of concern err on the lower side. Reduce further if cutting in May and application will be delayed for another week.

Where no slurry was applied, and a P allowance is available, what rate of 0-7-30 is appropriate for 1st cut silage?

Apply at a rate of 2.5 to 3 bags per acre

Where chemical fertiliser and slurry both need to be applied to silage ground, which should be applied first and how long should be left between applications?

Apply slurry first and leave one week between applications. In current weather conditions a gap between applications of 4 days should be sufficient.

Is it pointless spreading fertiliser on waterlogged ground?

Yes 100%, there is no benefit to applying on waterlogged soils and there is a substantial risk of losses to the environment.

How much of a weather window is required for applying fertiliser?

Do not apply if exceptionally heavy rain (10 to 12mm+ in a 24 hr period) is forecast in the following 24 to 36 hours.