

Autumn Grassland Management

Your focus on Grassland Management into the Autumn/early winter period should be on:

- **Maximising production of high quality late lactation milk**
- **Maximising utilisation of Autumn grass**
- **Planning for the provision of early grass next Spring**
- **Managing the new reseed**

1. Maximising production of high quality late lactation milk

Late summer/autumn milk is the most profitable milk because of good composition and low cost of production. A very important factor contributing to the efficient production of high protein milk is a good supply of high quality autumn grass, properly supplemented. Leafy autumn grass is highly digestible, high crude protein forage. However, it is low in energy as it has much lower sugar content than summer grass (9% vs. 21%). Supplementation is therefore required to provide the energy and quality protein required to produce this high quality late lactation milk. As well as providing energy to sustain milk production, supplementation in the autumn time will help to reduce feed demand and extend the grazing rotation. Supplementation of 3 to 4kgs should be more than adequate.

2. Maximising utilisation of autumn grass

With excellent growth rates over the last number of weeks, there has been ample opportunity to build up a good supply of grass on many dairy farms. To carry this bank of grass into late autumn time it is important to extend the rotation length. Grazing rotations should have been gradually lengthened from mid-August reaching 30-35 days in early September to build up peak covers by mid-September. However, it is important to not let covers build too heavy on wetter soils as it may be difficult to get these covers grazed out tight if the weather turns for the worst. With heavy covers the use of the strip wire is recommended to ensure a post grazing height of 4 -4.5cm. On lowly stocked farms, there may be a need to bring replacement stock back to the grazing platform to reduce the grass supply on farm. This will ensure not grazing too heavy of covers in October and November.

3. Planning for the provision of early spring grass

Autumn closing date and management have a large influence on the supply of grass available the following spring. 80% of grass grazed in Feb and early March is grown the previous October. To provide this early grass the target is to start the last rotation around the 5th of October. It is important to graze the heavy covers off the wettest land first before weather conditions do not allow grazing. It is also essential to get some of the best land grazed in early October as these will be your first spring paddocks. Aim to have 2/3rds of the farm closed by the 1st of November on dry land and 75% by the same date on wet land. Graze out tight to 4cm to ensure high quality grass in spring-time. Do not graze into late November and early December as this will cause grass shortages in the spring-time. This includes grazing of land with weanlings and/or sheep. There will be no problem in carrying covers of 1,100 (8-9cm) over the winter time. It will not be damaged by frost and will be perfect for grazing in early spring providing a high energy feed source for the lactating herd.

4. Managing the new reseed

A lot of reseeding has been carried out this year and most reseeds are looking very well. However, it is very important to apply a post emergence spray to maintain a sward clear of weeds and docks. Reseeds should be grazed tight in good conditions to encourage tilling over the winter. Autumn is also a very good time to apply P and K if soil indexes are low.