

BEEF

May 2017

Grass10 launched

Teagasc has launched Grass10, a new four-year campaign to promote sustainable grassland excellence, with its overall aim being to increase grass utilisation on Irish livestock farms. Of all of the resources that are on livestock farms, it is safe to say that grass is one of the most underutilised and there is huge scope to improve this. So this issue underlines current management practices to make the most out of both grass and silage. A stocking rate of 1,200kg/acre is required to keep on top of grass.

What is your rotation length?

For the main growing season, a 21-day rotation is required. This means you are grazing one-third of grazing ground per week. This means walking your farm once a week to check how much grass you have ahead of stock. Try imagining how long the grass

would last if growth stopped. In very good growing conditions you only need 10 days grass ahead of stock. Aim to graze 8-10cm covers (1,300-1,600kg DM/ha). If grass covers are too heavy, skip these paddocks and turn into paddocks that are the right cover. If you have a large number of paddocks that are too strong, you have the option of leaving some of them off to be cut with first-cut silage.

When do you plan to cut first-cut silage?

A lot of silage ground was not grazed this spring. So what sort of yield and quality can you expect this year? Research findings from Grange (average of six years) are detailed in **Table 1**.

Looking at this data, in an average year silage ground that was not grazed would produce a standing crop of

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5.63t DM, or roughly the equivalent of 11t/acre (fresh weight), by May 20. Ground that was grazed

in the third week of April is likely to reach a yield of 10t/acre (fresh weight) by June 19.

Table 1: Silage yield based on different spring grazing dates.

Harvest date	Grazing rates and yield (tonnes grass DM/ha)		
	Twice (March 16 and April 22)	Once (March 16)	None
May 20	1.49	4.36	5.63
May 30	2.61	5.93	7.48
June 9	3.61	7.17	9.12
June 19	4.9	8.49	9.69

Table 2: Silage quality based on different spring grazing dates.

Harvest date	Grazing rates and quality (grass DMD%)		
	Twice (March 16 and April 22)	Once (March 16)	None
May 20	82.9	79.6	77.0
May 30	81.1	76.1	74.4
June 9	80.3	75.7	72.2
June 19	76.4	70.4	68.7

What about quality? Looking again at data from Grange (**Table 2**), where closing was delayed until April 22 and silage was harvested on June 19, it had an equivalent DMD to silage not grazed and cut by May 20. However, protein percentage will be lower where silage ground is grazed.

As every year is different, silage crops will have to be assessed as the month goes on. Walk your silage fields weekly in May/June and book the contractor in time. If weather conditions are favourable, be prepared to harvest a few days early.

BETTER Farm Beef Challenge in Monaghan

Wesley Browne farms full time on around 58ha of heavy drumlin land in Dunraymond, Co. Monaghan. The farm itself is relatively fragmented and is divided over a number of different blocks. To counteract the heavy soil conditions and fragmentation, a zero grazer is used at the shoulders of the year to increase grass in the diet of the priority stock. Wesley is running an 80-cow, spring-calving suckler herd. All of the male progeny are slaughtered as U16-month bull beef. Wesley was profiled as part of the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) training videos, and most of his cows and heifers are four or five stars on the replacement index. Replacement heifers are home bred from high-index Angus, Limousin and

Simmental stock bulls, with suitable surplus heifers sold for breeding, and any unsuitable heifers slaughtered. Wesley hopes to increase cow numbers over the course of the programme but improvements need to be made to grassland management and soil fertility. Ph is the biggest issue



Thirteen-month-old bulls for slaughter.

with soil fertility and plans are being put in place to address this. Improvements in grassland management are already underway. Wesley is completing weekly grass measuring and has

implemented paddocks using both temporary and permanent fencing. As a result of the grass measuring, non-performing paddocks will be identified and a reseeding programme put in place.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Suckler herd breeding control

Professor David Kenny of Teagasc AGRIC, Grange reports on the potential for AI in Irish beef herds.

As a consequence of issues around the labour requirement for heat detection, land fragmentation and the part-time nature of most beef cow herds, there has been increasing interest in the use of oestrous or heat synchronisation protocols, which facilitate the use of timed AI (TAI). Such an approach involves all treated cows being inseminated at a pre-determined time, regardless of whether signs of heat are observed or not.

In order to obtain accurate and robust information on the potential for TAI for Irish beef cow herds as well as to evaluate available protocols, Teagasc, together with UCD and the Agriculture and Biosciences Institute of Northern Ireland recently conducted a series of large scale on-farm synchronisation studies, funded by the DAFM. The work involved 85 herds located throughout the island of Ireland, with 2,200 cows calved ≥ 35 days enrolled in the studies. Three different synchronisation protocols were compared, all of which were based on the use of a progesterone pessary (PRID E, CEVA Animal Health), inserted for a seven-day period. All cows were subjected to a single TAI at 72 hours after PRID removal, regardless of whether signs of heat were observed or not. Herd owners were free to use the semen of their choice (all herds used a commercial AI service), and thus semen from a

large number of bulls was used across the studies. Despite this, pregnancy rates ranged from 50-70% in these trials, with a very acceptable overall average pregnancy rate of 55% achieved to a single timed insemination. More importantly, synchronisation had the effect of tightening up the calving pattern and the subsequent breeding period in the following season. For example, we observed in a typical herd almost 80% of all synchronised cows were pregnant within 23 days of the start of the breeding season (i.e., between cows conceiving to TAI, plus those that conceived to a subsequent repeat breeding, three weeks later). While many herds elected to AI cows that repeated, others turned out stock bulls approximately ten days after the TAI. This latter practice is very efficient from both a labour and stock bull use viewpoint, and allows a herd to use maternal genetics through TAI and focus on terminal traits in their stock bull(s). For comprehensive information on the controlled breeding of both cows and heifers, as well as on general reproductive management of suckler cow herds, farmers are encouraged to refer to the proceedings of the Teagasc BEEF 2016 event:
www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2016/Teagasc-Grange-2016.pdf.

BDGP II is now open

The scheme is available to beef suckler farmers who are not already members of the scheme. The closing date for applications is May 8, and further details on the application process can be got by

contacting the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's (DAFM) offices in Portlaoise on beefschemas@agriculture.gov.ie or 076-106 4423.

Safe use of grassland herbicides

Major weeds such as docks, thistles, and rushes are major yield robbers in established grassland. May and June are ideal months to control these weeds. Care should be taken when applying herbicides to grassland. Safety for the user and the surrounding environment is paramount for the continued availability of these herbicides into the future. MCPA is the most commonly used herbicide in grassland, especially to control rushes. Ideally cut rushes and allow reasonable regrowth before using a herbicide. Weed lickers can be used but only with a glyphosate product. Before application of a herbicide, ensure the target is dry with no rain forecast for 48 hours, and the field is dry underfoot with no standing water, as this can lead to leakage to nearby rivers. If in doubt, delay application until better conditions arise.

There are a number of factors all farmers should consider when using grassland herbicides:

- your sprayer must be officially tested before use this year;
- only purchase as much herbicide as you need for the application;
- do not fill sprayers directly from rivers or streams;
- maintain boom 0.5m above the target to minimise spray drift;
- only apply to within 5m from field boundaries (or as per product label);
- wash out and clean down the sprayer in the field;
- triple rinse spray cans before disposal; and,
- ensure you have the proper safety equipment (gloves, face mask, etc.).



HEALTH & SAFETY

Look after your mental health

Mental health is vital for farmers. Farming is a challenging occupation and farm stressors can include: isolation; time pressure; financial worry; long working hours; bureaucracy; hazardous work; and, unpredictable occurrences. Social support has been shown to both alleviate mental distress and

help solve farming problems. Also, staying in contact with a health professional through having a regular health check-up is advised. The Green Ribbon campaign to break the stigma of silence associated with mental health takes place during the month of May.