

## Grass – keeping quality right

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It has been a dry cold spring but in general this has allowed paddocks to be well grazed out, without causing any real damage to the ground. The increased growth in May can often lead to grass getting ahead, so this month is important to get the quality back on track and keep grass digestibility high to maintain good weight gains for the remainder of the summer.

Digestibility is important because it will determine the energy content of the grass. Also, where grass availability is not limited, the grazing animals' intake will be influenced by digestibility. So we need to maintain a high leaf-to-stem ratio if we want to maximise energy and grass intake. In practical terms this means that:

- paddocks should be walked weekly to see how many days ahead you have and to see if any paddocks are getting too strong;
- target grazing covers of 8-10cm (1,300-1,600kg DM/ha);
- paddocks that get too strong for grazing should be taken out for baling;
- only consider topping paddocks that you haven't got to graze out well;
- ideally try and keep 12-14 days grazing ahead of stock, spread 30 units/acre of nitrogen (N) to maintain adequate supply;
- if you are in a sulphur-deficient area, you will get a response from spreading up to 15 units/acre over the summer

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months as part of your N application; and, ■ paddocks that have not been performing well all spring should be identified and targeted for reseeded. If you make the decision to reseed,

always keep in mind that with burning off and cultivation you should allow yourself sufficient time to have it completed and sown by mid August.

## Silage issues

Many of you will have already completed your first cut silage and hopefully conditions will have been right to allow good preservation. If you are still waiting to cut, monitor the crop regularly. Letting it grow on will certainly allow it bulk up, but it will also allow quality to decrease, so you must strike a balance.

Try to produce high-digestibility silage (70% plus DMD). Mow the crop when the seed heads start

to appear rather than targeting a specific date. If you are worried about high N then your local Teagasc office can test for that if you bring in a sample. Getting a good fast wilt that brings the silage dry matter up to around 30% will also improve your chances of a good preservation. Remember, a crop that has headed out and is lodging will rapidly drop in digestibility and add to your concentrate bill next winter.

**Table 1: Fertiliser options for second cut silage.**

Second cut grass silage N, phosphorus (P), potassium (K) (kg/ha) requirements (4t DM/ha or 8t fresh – high yield)		
N (units/acre)	P (units/acre)	K (units/acre)
Up to 100 (80)	16 (13)	100 (80)
Build up	Low P soils (Index 1 or 2)	Apply 10-20kg/ha
	Low K soils (Index 1 or 2)	Apply 30-60kg/ha

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Protect your skin

The Irish Cancer Society and the IFA recently launched their SunSmart campaign for farmers. Almost one in four (23%) skin cancer deaths in Ireland are people working in the construction, outdoor and farming industries. The SunSmart Code is as follows:

- cover up – wear a shirt with a collar, long shorts, and a hat that gives shade to your face, neck and ears;
- seek shade – especially from 11.00am to 3.00pm;
- wear wraparound sunglasses – always carry your sunglasses on the farm and make sure that they give UV protection; and,

- slap on sunscreen – make sure your sunscreen is SPF 15 or higher and has UVA protection. Visit [www.cancer.ie/SunSmart](http://www.cancer.ie/SunSmart) for more information.



*Protect against the sun.*



**BETTER FARM UPDATE**

## A lot going on

John McSweeney of Lissarda, Co. Cork talks about draughting, dairy-bred calves and more on his farm.

I farm 24ha of owned land, which is predominantly dry in nature and run a herd of 20 suckler cows. They calve in early spring and are run with an Angus stock bull. Bulls were slaughtered at under 16 months again this year and the average carcass weight was 381kg. All bar one graded U and they averaged €1,665 per head including bonuses. I have cut one paddock out for bales so far and aim to take out strong paddocks for bales as the year progresses, to both keep grass quality under control and ensure top-quality silage for growing stock.

I have purchased 96 dairy-bred calves so far this year. These are a mix of Angus and Friesians and were sourced from local dairy farms at one week old. Some will be sold at the end of the year for cash flow purposes, while the remainder will be sold as stores, or finished off on grass in the autumn of next year. All stock will be weighed in July, including cows. This will tell me how efficient my cows are when comparing cow weight to weaning weight. I have 12 steers which I purchased recently, also at grass. The target is to slaughter these later in the year off grass.

## Teagasc/AHI health events

Teagasc and Animal Health Ireland (AHI), in conjunction with meat processors, are planning to hold a series of beef health check events throughout the country in June and early July (Table 2).

The theme of these events is prevention is better than cure. Expertise will be available at all of the

events to discuss how we can be more proactive in the whole area of animal health.

Topics discussed will include: planning a dosing strategy at grass; the value of a herd health plan; what is the beef health check data telling us from the slaughter plants; and, how to diagnose and eliminate neospora abortion from herds.

**Table 2: Dates and locations of health events.**

Date	Host farmer	Location
June 22	Mark Moore	Kinnegad, Co. Westmeath
June 27	Andy Boylan	Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan
June 29	Walter Cleary	Kilmacow, Co. Kilkenny
July 7	David Killen	Manorcunningham, Co. Donegal
July 11	John Pringle	Aughrim, Co. Wicklow

## Calf to beef farm walks

The Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme will hold two farm walks starting at 2.00pm and 6.30pm on the farm of Christy Dowd, Tulsk, Co. Roscommon on Thursday, July 6. Christy has continued with his suckler enterprise since joining

the Programme, along with an Angus/Hereford heifer system and a Friesian steer system. Topics on the day will include animal health, financial budgets/performance, and optimising grass utilisation/reseeding. All are welcome.

## Beef Eurostar report

Last month, the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) completed its latest beef evaluation run. This means that all the animals in your herd will have been re-evaluated. By and large, there should be no significant change. For commercial herds under the latest run, a 4-star animal now starts at €76 and a 5-star animal starts at €95.

The Eurostar report, part of which is shown in **Figure 1**, is available on the HerdPlus section of the ICBF website. It is worth studying if you are in the Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP).

As the figure shows, it highlights where your herd ranks in overall Eurostar value compared to the average herd and the top 10% of herds nationally. It also breaks down the animals in your herd to show how many 4- and 5-star animals you have.

This will give you some indication as to how you will be fixed with regard to meeting the 20% 4- and 5-star female requirement in 2018.

Based on the herd replacement index, the report lists your top 10 and bottom 10 cows, and similarly your heifers. This can be useful in helping you decide what heifers you might keep for breeding or what cows could be culled.

It is a useful but underused report. Use the information from the report and compare it to what you have in front of you when you are looking at an animal. If you like what you see and the index matches up, then it might make some of the breeding or culling decisions easier. At the end of the day, that is what the index is all about: it is a tool to help us make better breeding choices.

A: The data contained in this report is based on the May 2017 Evaluation. ICBF re-evaluates Beef Eurostar values three times a year (April, August and December).

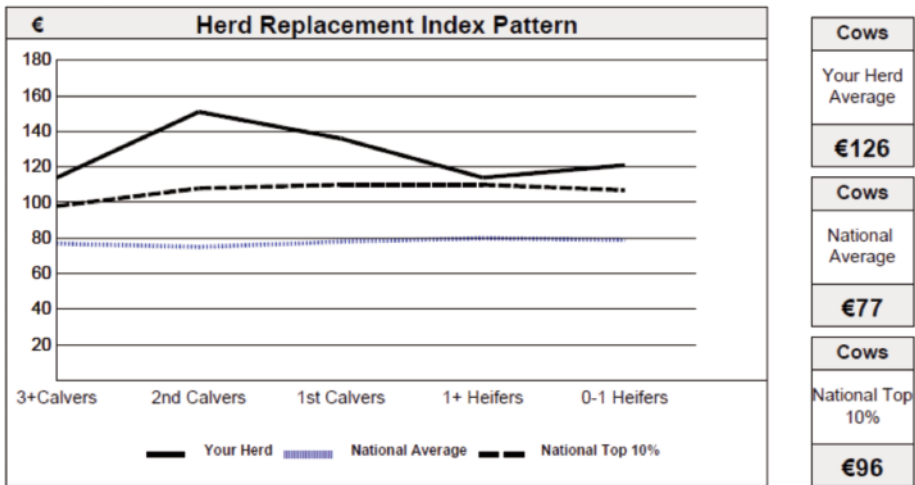


FIGURE 1: A section of the ICBF Eurostar report.