

DAIRY

June 2022

Get to grips with grass quality in June

Grass quality can be poorer in June due to increased stem content. This will decrease the digestibility of each kg of grass grazed. Grass stem is also difficult for cows to graze. The total energy intake of the cow will decrease and then herd milk performance will decrease as a result. However, with the right approach to grazing management, grass can be kept leafy. Every 5% increase in leaf content increases digestibility by one unit.

The only real way of ensuring high grass quality is to graze covers of grass at the correct pre-grazing yield. Many farmers unfortunately try to graze grass that is too high in yield and when the paddock should have been grazed two to three days earlier. Over the last two years, the average level of grass grazed by cows during June was over 1,600kg DM/ha, according to PastureBase

Ireland figures (www.pbi.ie). Grazing grass covers of 1,300-1,500kg DM/ha while maintaining an average rotation length of 18-21 days (assumes an average growth of 65kg DM/ha/day) will help maintain grass quality during June. Maintaining an average grass cover of 160-180kg DM/LU will ensure that high quality pasture is maintained.

Why are some farms struggling to control grass?

On many farms therefore, the simplest management adjustment is that cows need to arrive into paddocks two days earlier and skip the heavier covers for cutting. We hear sometimes that there is reluctance to do this for fear of running out of grass. However, it is grass growth rate compared to demand that will determine if the farm is gaining or losing

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cover. Continually grazing heavy covers will not prevent a shortage. Another common reason given is that the farmer doesn't like cutting light covers for bales on paddocks. However, taking out some surplus covers should be part of routine management – a

correctly stocked milking block will usually end up taking out about three to four bales per ha (about 120 bales on a 100-acre farm) across the season. This will help manage peak growth, keep cows on leafy grass all summer, and put extra winter feed in the yard.

Managing young calves at grass

Successfully managing young calves at grass requires a high level of stockmanship.

Your ears and eyes are the best tools that you have. Faecal samples are a good means of monitoring for stomach worms and need to be taken fresh on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday for immediate posting to a lab for assessment. With anthelmintic resistance prevalent, dose calves on the basis of evidence of a stomach worm infestation, rather than using a calendar-based approach.

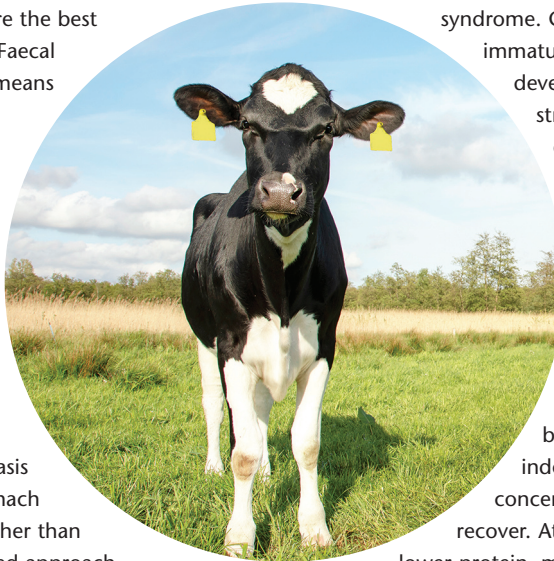
Testing faecal samples for lung worms on the other hand is largely useless because much of the damage has been done before the lungworm larvae appear in dung. Carefully check calves for coughing and watch the weather. Big outbreaks can occur in warm wet weather after periods of dry weather. Dose

when coughing starts to become apparent through a group of calves.

Grazing very leafy high quality grass for young calves immediately after turnout may result in a rise in the incidence of summer scour syndrome. Calves that have an

immature or poorly developed rumen can struggle to convert the excess ammonia from grass protein into urea. This can cause ulceration of the mouth, oesophagus, and intestine, leading to profuse scour. Once symptoms appear, bring calves back indoors onto a straw and concentrate diet until they recover. At turnout, feed them a

lower-protein, more-fibrous grass outdoors – in fact, the opposite of what you would imagine they should receive – until they're well adjusted to a grass-based diet. On farms where this issue is recurring, review pre-weaning calf nutrition to ensure calves are developing enough solid feed intake in advance of turnout.



Don't get caught out with burn-out

One of the biggest causes of conflict on farms is due to not having time off the farm. Along with this, starting capital projects like a new building or reclaiming land, and not having extra help planned to cover some of the extra hours of work creates massive pressure for the farmer and family members.

With calving now finished on spring-calving farms, now is a great time to plan time off and get through capital projects more easily with extra help. Job drift and stress can escalate if farmers are not mindful of how they are applying themselves to different jobs.

Use a yearly wall planner to get organised

It is quite uncommon to see a yearly planner located in the office of dairy farms. Some might say I do not employ someone full-time, so therefore I do not need one! However, a simple yearly planner is of benefit to every farm regardless of herd size and whether or not they have family help or outside help. It provides a focus for planning a few months ahead. If you have someone working for you, then his or her holidays must then be marked off. Capital development work should also be marked off. A relatively small relief labour budget for help at busy times on the farm can mean the difference between stress and burn-out, and an enjoyable place to work.

CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control



Do you continue to have high somatic cells counts (SCC)

with ongoing clinical mastitis cases on your farm? If you do, then the CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control are a very useful resource for you. They are available free of charge on the Animal Health Ireland website, and are divided into the five key stages of the cow's lactation cycle for ease of use. They explain the challenges and provide simple recommendations on farm management to control mastitis.

For each specific period of the lactation cycle, a detailed set of guidelines can be referred to by farmers and service providers. These guidelines describe the steps to monitor, review and plan

mastitis management practices on farm throughout the lactation cycle. Please see details at following link:

<https://animalhealthireland.ie/programmes/cellcheck/farm-guidelines/>.



FIGURE 1: CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control cover the entire lactation cycle.

Ballyhaise '22 – Futureproofing Irish dairy systems

Wednesday, July 13 – 10.00am–5.00pm

Invitation to all Irish dairy farmers and dairy industry stakeholders

Teagasc is delighted to invite all dairy farmers and dairy industry stakeholders to Ballyhaise '22, on Wednesday, July 13, at Ballyhaise Agricultural College, Ballyhaise, Co. Cavan. The theme of this year's event is 'Futureproofing Irish Dairying'. Irish dairy farmers have expanded significantly since the abolition of milk quotas in 2015 and this has resulted in a very significant addition to family farm income. Future development of the dairy

industry will require a close alignment with EU and national policy objectives, with a particular focus on reduced carbon emissions and improved water and air quality and biodiversity.

Ballyhaise '22 will highlight the various technologies and practices available to farmers to underpin future farm profitability and sustainability. Key themes include: profitable production systems; new frontiers in dairy breeding; establishing clover systems; and, benchmarking performance and costs. A range of practical demonstrations will be on display also.

Financial support for our research programme from State grants and Dairy Levy research funds is gratefully acknowledged.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Keeping children safe on the farm

The health and safety of children is paramount on farms, especially during the busy summer months. In recent years, there has been an increase in children dying on farms. What can be done? Firstly, a farm childhood safety code of practice is available on the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) website, giving authoritative guidance.

Parents or guardians have the key role to play in motivating, instructing and guiding children and youth about farm safety. A recent Canadian study



clearly shows the positive motivational influence of parents. Key approaches include ensuring that farmyards are free of hazards to children, and that they do not have access to farm locations when hazardous work is in progress. A secure play area is a crucial requirement for younger children. The Teagasc Jessy's Smart Kids newsletter series for children can be downloaded from the Teagasc website. These provide enjoyable and motivating puzzles and quizzes for kids related to farm safety.

