

Grassland Science Department

Title

Increasing the resilience of Irish dairying through improved dairy cow nutrition in early lactation

Abstract

Ireland's competitive advantage in milk production is based on the efficient production and utilisation of pasture. The Food Harvest 2020 report has set the ambitious target of increasing milk production by 50% by 2020. To be financially prudent, this increase in milk production must be produced predominantly from grazed pasture. Within the dairy cow nutrition research strategy, five experimental research platforms were identified: on farm, field component, laboratory component, farm system and simulation modelling and decision support. From a total of six investment areas identified, Early Lactation Nutrition was identified as the priority area for research investment. The objective of this research programme is to measure the variability in feed supply on farms, understand the effect of varying levels of DM intake in early lactation on animal performance, health and well-being, establish the response to supplementary feeds under different levels of feed allowance, and through modelling practical scenarios develop decision support resources that will optimise dairy cow feeding at farm level. The successful delivery of this programme will result in increasing the resilience of Irish dairying through increased farm productivity, improved cow health and welfare, reduced environmental footprint and increased processing value of milk.

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