

3rd November 2020

Grass Grows Grass – Even Over Winter

Beef farmer Aidan Maguire farms outside Navan, Co. Meath running a dairy calf to beef farm finishing 75 cattle this year growing this to 120 next year. To date 81% of the farm is closed, one week ahead of the 62% target. Because of this and heavy rain Aidan decided to house most of the heavier stores last week. This will lengthen the grazing season for weanlings and help avoid poaching. Aidan tested silage from surplus paddocks on the home block at 75% DMD and 17% CP.



Aidan's Current Grass Performance	
AFC (Kg DM/Ha)	619
Growth (Kg DM/Ha/Day)	16
Demand (Kg DM/Ha/Day)	12
Stocking Rate (LU/Ha)	2.1
Kg LWT/Ha	670

To help keep the weanlings at grass, flexibility is key. They get 1 kg concentrate and moved to paddocks closer to the yard with access back into a shed if weather is bad. Aidan then moves them back out to graze the less sheltered paddocks during settled spells. The plan is to keep the weanlings out until mid Nov. **They will only be housed fully for 9-10 weeks with the hope to get them back out grazing by day in late January.**

The first paddocks closed received a light application of slurry and they have 1000+ kg DM/ha back on them which has helped maintain AFC allowing Aidan to graze for longer in the autumn and still have grass for the spring.

Once AFC drops below 500 Kg DM/ha (or grazing covers less than 1000 kg DM/ha) animals should be housed straight away. If grazing continues most of the paddocks will have only one leaf present during the winter. This is detrimental to over winter growth. **"I ran the AFC down too far last year and could have done with a lot more grass in the spring."** Aidan experienced this last year when AFC dropped to 366 Kg DM/ha in mid Nov and the opening cover on Jan 23rd was 425 Kg DM/ha (growing less than 1 kg DM/ha per day). He is focused on avoiding that problem this year.

This year he is targeting a closing cover on Dec 1st of 600 kg DM/ha to get out to graze early again next year. **Continuing to walk the farm is crucial to meeting that target as it will help Aidan decide when to stop grazing.**

Aidan's Autumn Rotation Planner

WEEK	TARGET HA GRAZED/DAY	TARGET HA GRAZED BY WEEK END	ACTUAL HA GRAZED BY WEEK END	TARGET %	ACTUAL %
27/09/2020 - 03/10/2020	0.56	3.90	6.13	12	19
04/10/2020 - 10/10/2020	0.56	7.81	10.7	25	33
11/10/2020 - 17/10/2020	0.56	11.71	15.99	37	50
18/10/2020 - 24/10/2020	0.56	15.61	21.96	49	69
25/10/2020 - 31/10/2020	0.56	19.52	25.76	62	81
01/11/2020 - 07/11/2020	0.90	25.84		82	
08/11/2020 - 14/11/2020	0.90	31.60		100	

Looking Ahead To The Spring With LESS

William Burchill works on the Teagasc/Dairygold Joint Programme and has investigated the N value of cattle slurry depending on the technique used and timing of application (Table 1 on right). Using either the trailing shoe or dribble bar (LESS techniques) improves the efficiency of N within slurry by around 3 units of N per 1,000 gal compared to using splash-plate. The 1st application of N of 23 units N/acre in late January or February can be replaced on a large portion of the farm by applying 2,500 gal/acre of slurry with the dribble bar or trailing shoe i.e. 8.7 unit N/1,000 gal × 2,500 gal/acre = 21.75 units N/acre. This allows for the shifting of fertiliser N applications to later in the spring where there is a higher grass growth response to fertiliser N. Where slurry is applied for 1st cut silage to supply P and K the N value in the slurry N should be considered and taken off the recommended 100 units N/acre for 1st cut silage using the figures from Table 1. For example, if 3,000 gal/acre of cattle slurry is applied by trailing shoe for 1st cut silage fertiliser N application can be brought back to around 74 units N/acre i.e. (100 N units – 26.1 N units from the slurry = 74 units N from fertiliser).

Gallon/Acre	Spring (units N/acre)		
	Splash-plate	Dribble bar & trailing shoe	Injection system
1,000	6.5	8.7	10.8
2,000	13	17.4	21.6
3,000	19.5	26.1	32.4

Gallon/Acre	Summer (units N/acre)		
	Splash-plate	Dribble bar & trailing shoe	Injection system
1,000	3.3	5.4	7.6
2,000	6.6	10.8	15.2
3,000	9.9	16.2	22.8

Table 1. Units N/acre depending on timing of cattle slurry application, application rate and the application technique used.