

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Summer 2018

GOATS

Development of the Irish Dairy Goat Industry

The past decade has seen a significant increase in the number of Irish Goats Cheeses available to consumers. The outstanding quality of the cheeses produced here in Ireland is proven by the high number of awards received both in Ireland and internationally, each and every year. The unimaginable hard work put in by these farmers and cheese makers has led to this high level of success and long may it continue its upward trajectory. The liquid milk market has been steady in recent years, with a single major processor in the country. A number of other farms are now packaging their milk and selling it in their own locality. Given the standards and regulations with regard to food products in Ireland, these farm families deserve high praise.

In order to see any significant overall expansion in the dairy goat industry, substantial investment in a new dairy product is required. Our domestic market is small so perhaps looking internationally is the only option. The challenge when looking externally is scale – substantial quantities of milk would be required. Therefore investment is not just needed at a processor level but also on-farm, from a group of like-minded individuals but neither of these will ever come into existence without the other. Whether this type of project occurs in the sector remains to be seen, but one thing is certain: Irish goat farmers work incredibly hard, mostly on their own with little support outside of one or two reliable contacts. Regardless of any investment, closer working ties between Irish goat farmers and sharing of the wealth of knowledge and experience they have built up would be substantially beneficial to all involved.

Importance of Lime

Weather conditions are recognised as one of the main reasons why lime is not spread on Irish farms. However, ground conditions will rarely be as good as they are at the moment so it is an ideal time to apply lime on your farm. Up to 70% of soils in Ireland are below optimum for grass growth, despite having numerous benefits:

- Increase grass production annually;
- Release up to 80kg N/ha/year;
- Unlock soil phosphorus (P) and potassium (K);
- Increase the response to freshly applied N, P & K;
- Increased survival & productivity of rye grasses & clover.

How much lime?

- Test soils on a regular basis (every 3 to 5 years) to determine lime requirements
- Only apply lime based on a recent soil test report
- Don't exceed 7.5t/ha in a single application
- Application rates >7.5t/ha, apply 50% now & remainder in 2 year
- Apply lime to 20% of the farm annually

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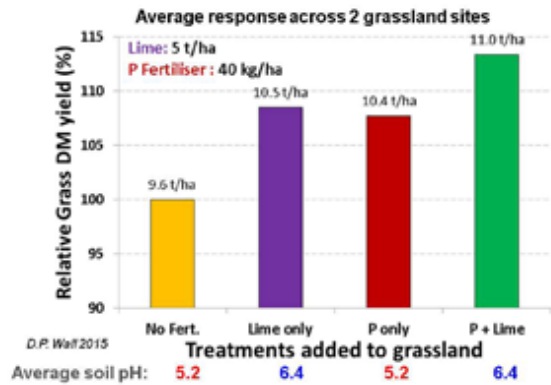
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Importance of soil pH for Grass Production

- Correcting soil pH from 5.2 to 6.3 increased grass production by at least 1.0 t/ha (See figure 2)
- The application of 5t/ha ground limestone produced similar grass yields compared to the application of 40 kg/ha P fertiliser alone on soils with low pH
- The addition of lime + P fertiliser in combination produced the largest grass yield response (1.5 t/ha more grass than the control in the season of application)
- Lime increases the availability of both stored soil P and freshly applied fertiliser P

NB: Leave at least 3 months between liming and harvesting silage.



Preparation for the Breeding Season

The success of a breeding season can depend hugely on correct preparations. Starting now should allow sufficient time to have everything in place to optimise reproductive performance. Some of the important factors to consider are:

Culling

The first step in preparing for the breeding season is selecting and removing does are not going to the billy. Reasons for this could be poor production, disease, repeated health issues or lameness, producing poor kids or personality traits such as bullying.

Select your best goats

Obtaining high quality replacements from your best goats is the priority, so these animals should receive particular attention to ensure they are in top condition prior to breeding.

Condition Score

Condition score has a significant effect on pregnancy rate and litter size. Go through your goats and segregate any that are thin. This should be done at least 8 weeks before breeding to allow them to put on sufficient body weight.

Minerals

If browsing naturally outdoors, goats can regulate their mineral intake and deficiencies are rarely a problem. However for housed stock with a controlled diet it is vital to ensure that breeding animals are receiving adequate levels of minerals to achieve peak reproductive performance and strong, healthy kids.

Feet

Check the feet of the breeding does and treat any animals showing signs of lameness.

Vaccinate

All animals should receive a booster shot for clostridial diseases every six months. One prior to the breeding season and another 4-6 weeks before kidding.

Dosing

A faecal egg count should be carried out and a worm dose administered if required.

Males

All of the above are also important for males. However it is important to check out the 'business end' of the billy. The testicles produce the sperm and should be large, symmetrical and firm - like a clenched bicep. The spongy epididymis runs along the testicle and is where sperm is stored. Any irregularities in either may indicate a problem.

Goat Bites

Health issues

As the goat industry in Ireland is relatively small, there is little by way of legislation that specifically addresses the sector. As a result issues can sometimes arise, for example with regard to TB testing, use of medicines and animal movements. If you have experienced a problem please email me the details (cian.condon@teagasc.ie) and a collective approach will be made to DAFM in an effort to alleviate future problems.

Course Update

It is proposed to hold a goat course in the coming months. If you know someone interested or have input on what content might be important please send details to me at the above email address.