

Building Grass for the Autumn

By Martin Mulherrins, Dairy Advisor on the Teagasc/Aurivo Joint Programme

It is amazing the difference a year can make. As one farmer commented recently **“if only we had an audiotape of this time last year”** to remind us of the tough spring, concerns over silage shortages and in many areas, the drought. Thankfully, grass growing and grazing conditions have been excellent this year and growth rates continue to exceed demand on the majority of farms.

Regardless of what has happened to date, it is now time to start building grass for the Autumn. The reason for this is to have a bank of grass on the farm which allows for the grazing season to be extended while also setting up the farm for next spring. Targets vary depending on stocking rate but a rule of thumb is to have an average farm cover of 1000 kg DM/ha and a cover/cow of 300-330kg DM by September 1st. It is worth noting that farms carrying more than 3.0 cows/ha should avoid allowing peak farm cover going over 1200kg DM/ha because this would mean cows are grazing covers in excess of 2000kg DM/ha. Covers this high are more difficult to graze out and are slower to recover.

It has not been uncommon in recent weeks to see cows grazing very heavy covers (2000kg DM/ha+). These paddocks should have been taken out in the form of surplus bales. One of the main reasons this decision was not made was due to uncertainty over the quantity of grass on farms. This is where grass measuring has a major role to play. Grass measuring and budgeting gives farmers the confidence to make decisions quickly. Walking and measuring your own farm is the preferred option but there are now an increasing number of farmers availing of local grass measuring services. In this case someone else will walk your farm for you, input the measurements to Pasture Base and give you advice based on the grass available on your farm. This will greatly help with understanding and achieving the above targets as well as maximising grass utilisation on your farm. This is important because the farms that utilise the most grass are generally the most profitable.

In addition to weekly walks of the farm, other points to consider in relation to grassland management over the coming weeks include;

- Keep applying Nitrogen to capitalise on August growth rates and to build grass.
- Rotation length should be extended to reach 30 days by 1st September.
- Make all land available for grazing to extend the rotation.
- Remove surplus livestock from the platform to reduce demand.
- Continue to graze down to 4-4.5cm to stimulate growth and to avoid carrying over dead material into next spring.
- Use the Pasture Base grass budget to help you build grass and as a guide in relation to supplementation levels.

Breeding

Breeding has gone well on most farms and in many cases bulls have been pulled for almost a month. If bulls are still in at this stage some cows will be calving in late May next year. These cows will not be as profitable as earlier calving cows.

Heifers

Some farmers have weighed heifers in the past week and they are hitting their targets. Heifer calves should be at least 30% of their mature weight now while in-calf heifers should be at

least 70% of their mature weight. For example if the mature weight of the cows in your herd is 580kg then heifer calves should now be 174kg+ and in-calf heifers should be 406kg+.

Autumn Grazing Targets

Date	Cover/Cow (Kg DM)	Average Farm Cover (Kg DM/Ha)	Rotation Length
STOCKING RATE OF 2.5 LU/HA			
1 st August	180	450	20 Days
Mid - August	200	500	25 Days
1 st September	300	750	30 Days
Mid-September	400-450	1,000-1,100	35 Days
1 st October	400	1,000	40 Days
1 st November	60% of your grazing platform should be closed for Spring at this stage		
Fully Housed		600	
STOCKING RATE OF 3.0 LU/HA			
1 st August	180	540	20 Days
Mid - August	250	750	25 Days
1 st September	330	990	30 Days
Mid-September	370	1100	35 Days
1 st October	380	1150	40 Days
1 st November	65% of your grazing platform should be closed for Spring at this stage		
Fully Housed		650-700	
STOCKING RATE OF 3.5 LU/HA			
1 st August	190-200	650-700	20 Days
Mid - August	220	770	25 Days
1 st September	280	980	30 Days
Mid-September	340	1200	35 Days
1 st October	335	1175	40 Days
1 st November	75% of your grazing platform should be closed for Spring at this stage		
Fully Housed		700-750	