

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 12th June 2020

Managing Through The Drought

- Walk your farm and assess your own farm situation,
- Graze a maximum of 4% of your farm per day to hold rotation length at 25 days. It is crucial that grass supply on farms is “stretched” to keep grass in the diet of the animal.
- If you need more than 4% per day to supply feed requirements you need to supplement with concentrate feeds, and/or hay/silage
- Every farm should be grazing to 4cm.
- Avoid topping as its wasting feed and will also inhibit regrowth.
- Graze strong paddocks < 2,500kg DM/ha, do not remove as surplus bales. Graze with a strip wire and back fence
- Graze areas meant for second cut silage
- On out-farms where grass is closed for silage, either graze or harvest as silage, do not allow grass to burn back into the ground.
- Order concentrate feeds well in advance of needing supplies as delivery may be slowed due to demand.
- Ensure stock always have access to a clean supply of water. Monitor supplies daily

Fertiliser Recommendations

- Fertiliser N and organic manure (N-P-K-S) applications should be tailored to N demand (current growth rate) of the grass swards under restricted growth & dry soil conditions. Where re-growths are poor or non-existent, stop spreading fertiliser. Have fertiliser bought for spreading as soon as rain comes
- Where possible, use a compound N-P-K or N-K fertiliser as the potassium (K) will help grass to be more resilient to drought conditions and to improve nitrogen uptake and growth
- If SMD (soil moisture deficit) ≥ 50 mm and grass growth rates fall to <50 kg DM/ha per day reduce fertiliser N applications in line with demand and top up with additional N once sufficient rain arrives.
- If SMD (soil moisture deficit) is ≥ 75 (severe drought) and grass growth is $\ll 50$ kg DM/ha hold off further N applications until sufficient rain arrives or further rain is forecast.

Beef

Suckler Cows and Calves

- Wean autumn born calves and restrict cows.
- Prioritise feeding for spring calved cows/heifers still with the bull, those already in calf can be restricted slightly.
- Supplement with silage or hay to ensure no more than 4% of the grazing area is grazed per day. High fibre concentrates may have to be considered at a later stage.
- Use baled silage, as it can be open from day one of baling. Do not open pit silage within 3 weeks of ensiling and ideally avoid feeding pit silage. If pit silage is fed, always ensure the pit

is sealed correctly when the feeding period finishes.

- Cull unproductive cows (not in calf, late calvers, poor performers) to reduce demand

Other Beef Cattle

- Supplement yearlings and store cattle with grass silage or hay to maintain a 25 day rotation. If necessary supplement with concentrates to reduce overall forage levels used per week
- Feed heavier animals within 40-50 days of finish with 5kg + of meal at grass. Introduce meal over 8-10 days to reduce the risk of stomach issues.

On the latest episode of The Beef Edge podcast John Maher, Grass10 Campaign Manager discusses actions farmers need to take with current drought conditions on farms. QR below



Sheep

- On sheep farms short of grass, consider weaning lambs immediately
- Draft lambs, at weaning time, down to 18kg carcass to reduce demand (36-38kg live weight with adequate cover)
 - Introduce / supplement lambs with concentrates ad-lib where grass supply is below 7 days ahead, consider reducing to 500 grams per day for lighter lambs as covers exceed 10 days ahead.
 - Create a finishing group (lambs 34kg upwards) for preferential concentrate supplementation on all farms experiencing grass shortages.
 - Where available supplement weaned ewes with hay or silage on restricted area to allow cover to build up
 - Supplement until covers have increased to provide 15+ days grazing ahead with favourable growing conditions
 - Cull unproductive ewes

Dairy

- Where grass is in deficit, a dairy farmer should feed concentrates first, up to 6kg/head/day.
- Farms are using the following strategy to reduce demand for grass: 1/3 diet concentrates, 1/3 diet silage, 1/3 diet grass
- If silage reserves are very low on a farm, a feed like palm kernel, soya hulls, beet pulp etc. or a 3 way mix can also aid in supplementing the feed deficit. At least 50% of the diet must be grass and/or silage to avoid acidosis.
- Where higher levels (above 7kg) of concentrate are being fed, a regime of feeding three times a day needs to be implemented.

Watch Your Cash Flow

Take action now to address cash flow problems. Fertiliser will give a significant return on investment when the rain does come.

Contact your advisor or accountant to help complete a cash flow budget and a more detailed monthly plan, if required. Your accountant can give you advice relating to your tax liability for 2019 / 2020, good planning could reduce this exposure.

Stay safe! Additional tasks of feeding animals and associated tractor work are necessary. Be careful and always carry a mobile phone!

