

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 12th November 2021

Grassland: Last week was a big improvement in terms of weather compared with the week before. The heavy rain the previous week made grazing conditions very difficult. We are into the time of year where ground will only dry out very slowly even in a dry spell so wetter ground may not dry out much at all even with the good weather of the past week. Continue to use on-off grazing to keep grass in the diet for as long as possible. Be prepared to bring cows in after 3 hours if weather is wetter to avoid poaching. Where your farm cover is high, reduce any silage fed and prioritise grass in the diet. Weekly farm walks are critical to reach the right closing farm cover on December 1st. The closing farm cover is dependent on your farm stock rate. Higher stock farms will need to close with a higher average farm cover than lower to medium stock farms. For example, the average farm cover (AFC) target on a farm stocked at 3-3.5 LU/ha will be 700 to 750 kg DM/ha where as on a farm stocked at 2.5 LU/ha would be 600-650 closing cover. Therefore if your target is 700 kg DM/ha on Dec 1st, then the AFC on Nov 10th should be 500-550 Kg DM/ha (20 days x 10 kg DM/day = + 200 Kg DM/ha).

If weather conditions remain good, do not be tempted to re-graze closed paddocks or else your farm growth rates over the winter will be reduced and you will leave yourself short for the spring. PastureBase is an excellent tool to manage grass and reach the targets. You can analyse your PBI data using the reports section.

National Soil Sampling Campaign

Ranking and selection of the 15,900 applications has been finalised except for the 150 applications that went in by post/email. Between 6,000 and 9,000 applicants are expected to be approved under this tranche in the scheme. The first 50% of successful applicants will be notified next week by letter of being successful and the remaining 50% will be notified the following week. Those that were not successful will be notified at the start of the next application Tranche.

Sheep Breeding Season

The breeding season is well under way on most farms but farmers should not lose site of the management of the rams after the breeding season is over. The ram is an expensive animal. They eat very little during the breeding season and as a result lose weight. An active ram can lose 15-20% of bodyweight (1-1.5BCS) or 10 – 25kg of liveweight over a five to six week mating period. Rapidly regaining bodyweight will greatly improve rams chances of surviving the winter period. Key points to remember are; Ram lambs are still growing and need much higher levels of nutrition to sustain rebuilding body condition lost during mating and for growth. Autumn / winter grass is low in energy, often in short supply and intake is further reduced during wet weather. At best you can expect to gain 0.4kg per week and in most situations the grass provided will be maintenance only. A ram gaining 0.4kg per week will need the entire winter (25weeks) just to regain 10kg lost during 5-6 weeks of mating. The need for concentrate supplementation cannot be overstated. Feeding 0.5kg per head per day of a suitable lamb / ram concentrate feed (must contain ammonium chloride) should be considered until rams have regained body condition lost during mating and longer for ram lambs as they are still growing. The relative to the cost of the ram 25 to 30kg of concentrate is a modest investment. Where grass supply is not sufficient to meet the grazing needs of the rams they must be either housed and fed hay/silage or supplemented with forage outdoors. Where rams are out wintered the provision of a dry lie and shelter will greatly increase animal comfort, health, performance and welfare.