

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 24th July 2020

Grazing Messages

1. Growth exceeding demand nationally, with a favourable forecast for grass growth this week
2. High pre grazing yields greater than 1600 kg DM/ha will compromise on graze outs and milk production
3. Farmers must REACT to high grass covers and take them out as high quality surplus bales
4. Identify paddocks for reseeding in early August. Use Pasturebase total tonnage grown per year over the last 2/3 years to help identify paddocks that are underperforming
5. Now is an ideal time to spread lime on farms

Reseeding

6. Farmers had put off reseeding due to the dry weather
7. Late July/ Early August— key time to complete reseeding— high soil temperature
8. These paddocks need to be sprayed off in next 7-10 days
9. Use varieties off the Pasture Profit index
10. High returns on reseeding—18 month payback from increased grass growth
11. Identify paddocks for reseeding using Pasturebase annual tonnage over the last 2/3 years

Beef Sustainability Demo Farm in Kilkenny – Update from Brian Blackmore

Kilkenny beef farmer Brian Blackmore is keen on improving his farm's sustainability and one of the many changes he has made is the use of protected urea as the main nitrogen source on his farm. Although Brian has been open to making this change he is also sceptical as to how good it may be. Research shows that protected UREA will grow as much grass as CAN whilst being cheaper per unit of N, but in order for Brian to see this for himself, he is currently carrying out his own field trials to assess protected urea on his farm.

Brian spread 25 units of nitrogen on both sides of the field on the 22nd of June, using UREA + S on one side and CAN + S on the other side. Last week he measured the grass yield. When spreading, both sides were bare having been grazed at the same time. When measured there was little difference in terms of grass yield with approximately 1600kg DM/ha. Brian plans on topping up the field with another 20 units of nitrogen and cutting for silage at the end of July as grass supply on the farm is more than adequate. The field will be measured every week and then the yield of silage measured at cutting to see if there is a difference in the yield between the two treatments. Maybe you might consider using some protected urea on your farm?

Nutrient Management Planning

One area that Brian is concentrating on is using his nutrient management plan to decide what fertiliser to use and where. Brian will target his compounds at the fields lowest in P & K. Lime will also be targeted at the fields that have low pH.

What is nutrient management planning?

Nutrient management planning is all about maximising output from soils whilst protecting them and the wider environment in which we farm. A nutrient management plan (NMP) takes the soil analysis of a farm along with the stocking rate and calculating what nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium levels can be applied in order to improve soil fertility, carry the farms stocking rate and also stay compliant with nitrates regulations.

Why complete a nutrient management plan?

Fertilisers are an expensive farm input so in order to improve their efficiency and save money these fertilisers should be targeted to the fields that need them most and the only way to accurately do this is through the completion of an NMP. Farms also have a source organic fertiliser in the form of slurry and farmyard manure, these organic fertilisers are extremely valuable and often overlooked, an NMP takes into account these organic fertilisers which in turn reduces the chemical fertiliser inputs. An NMP will also give a liming plan for the farm which when followed will increase fertiliser efficiency on the farm by improving soil pH.

How to complete a nutrient management plan?

The first stage to a nutrient management plan is taking soil samples. Samples should be taken every 5 ha on the farm whilst taking into account different soil types, field divisions and cropping history. These samples need to be taken at least 3-6 months after the last fertiliser application. Average stock numbers for the year and the winter months needs to be known in order to predict the farms stocking rate and this will also give the amount of organic fertiliser that will be available on the farm. Total tonnes of concentrate feeds used in the previous year needs to be entered into the plan as this feeds into the amount of chemical phosphorous allowed to be spread on the farm.

Once all the information is gathered and entered into the plan the advisor and farmer sit down together to plan out where to spread all the organic fertiliser and then put a chemical fertiliser plan in place for each individual field to improve its soil fertility. The farmer receives a detailed report leaving the Teagasc office showing the soil fertility levels, lime requirements, organic fertiliser plan and the chemical fertiliser plan for the year ahead.