Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Notes

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 25th February 2022

Rewards are high for grazing in February!

Every extra day out on grass, it is worth €2.70/cow and €2/LU of drystock. Given the inclement weather forecast for the next few days, it's critical to keep cows well fed, limit damage to paddocks, and strive for grazing residuals of 4cm. The average farm cover (AFC) is 932kgDM/ha, according to *Pasture Base Ireland*. Grazing needs to be aggressive in spring because there is a lot of grass on farms. As a result, every opportunity to feed grass to the cows should be taken. Walking your farm is the only method for you to know whether a paddock is suitable for grazing. Decisions about grass management and grazing cannot be made in the farmyard; they must be made in the field!

To get started with grazing: Walk the farm, assess ground conditions and grass covers in each paddock. (Record on *PastureBase)*. If you're not signed up with *PastureBase*; contact your local Teagasc advisor. **Please note; farmers applying for *Nitrates Derogation 2022* will be required to complete one grass measure in February 2022.**

Grazing targets to meet:
The target is to have a 30% grazed by the 1st of March so you must have a plan to reach this target on the farm. Identify the drier paddocks, best infrastructure with multiple access points or paddocks with a low cover (800-1000KgDM/Ha). When weather improves, graze the heavier covers. (Ideally, these should be grazed only after the 30% grazing target has been achieved). Make every effort to get cows out for 2-3 hours on these paddocks after each milking (strip graze/ back-fence). On/off grazing is ideal for getting grass into the cows' diet, when the weather is unsettled. Have plenty sets of reels and pigtail posts ready. ***Remember a herd of cows can achieve 90% of their daily grass intake in 3 hours after each milking compared to cows out full-time.***
Use PastureBase website/app to create a spring grass budget and spring rotation planner. This gives you farm-specific information that lets you keep track of your grass supplies and supplement levels. By grazing a defined area each day, the spring rotation planner takes the guesswork out of grazing management. It will guide you achieve the target of 30% grazed by March 1st and 65-70% grazed by the 17th of March to ensure that you will be starting your 2nd rotation in early April (5-10th). On heavier land, adjust these dates by 7-10 days. For example if you have a dry farm area of50ha, the target is 15ha by 1st March; 30ha by St. Patrick's Day and 100% by 5th April. Focus on grazing lower covers to reach these targets first.
To determine the rate of nitrogen to be spread for your farm, it will depend on your farm stocking rate and demand for grass. Urea is the fertiliser of choice as it is most stable than CAN at this time of year, especially with the cost of fertiliser now. Per unit of N, it is also the 2nd cheapest after Protected Urea, which is difficult to source at the moment. Make sure to adjust your rates by taking the nutrient value of your slurry into account first. You advisor can use a slurry hydrometer to establish the N,P,K value of your slurry. Despite the cost and availability issues, it is critical to have a supply of N in the soil as it will have an impact on spring grass growth. Prioritise paddocks with good soil fertility, recently reseeded or those with a good perennial ryegrass content for early nitrogen. You can also target covers with over 400 kg/ha and drier ground with soil temperatures above 6^0 C. Watch weather forecast – do not apply fertiliser if heavy rain is forecast within the next 48 hours. Lower rates of N will suffice on wetter/colder ground with low perennial ryegrass content that take longer to grow in the spring.

Dry dairy farms should apply 60 units of nitrogen per acre by April 1st . 45 units of nitrogen per acre is enough on heavy farms by the 15th of April. This can be achieved with a combination of chemical fertiliser and slurry. Where P&K are required, apply 18-6-12 when soil temperatures are over 10°C from mid-March to late-April. Check your nitrate and phosphate allowances on you NMP plan to with your advisor.