

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 29th May 2020

Soil moisture deficits have begun to impact on daily grass growth on some farms, with growth rates on some farms falling below 45kg DM per day (PastureBase May 2020). Given the risk of sustained dry weather, it is important that prompt actions are taken to manage the situation.

Grazing management decision rules

1. The main priority now is to reduce daily grass demand. This will help to hold grass cover on the farm, protecting current growth and speeding up recovery when rain arrives.
2. Rotation length must be maintained at 24-25 days approximately.
3. Increasing rotation length beyond 30 days may lead to much reduced grass quality in current conditions.
4. Post grazing residuals of 4 to 4.5cm must be maintained , otherwise feed is being wasted
5. Maintain fertilizer N applications after grazing. Risk of N losses are low at present. However, if drought conditions persist to >60mm soil moisture deficit it is advised delay N until rain is forecast

BEEF & SHEEP SUPPLEMENTATION

Beef

1. Supplement with standing crops of silage where you can do so, no point baling it to feed the bale
2. Alternatively, suckler cows may be offered a bale of silage in the field in a round feeder
3. Other cattle e.g. finishing cattle could be offered up to 4-5 kg of meals
 - a. Where grass is getting very tight, consider feeding silage + meals to finishing stock

Sheep

1. Where lambs are 9-10 weeks old, consider early weaning onto good grass and meals
2. Hold weaned ewes on limited grass

DAIRY SUPPLEMENTATION

Concentrate Feeding Guidelines: Parlour-fed concentrate will form a major part of daily feed allowance in drought conditions. Some decisions rules are:

- Feed up to 5-6kg of parlour concentrate per day as part of an overall feed plan. A further 2-3kg of high fibre straights can be fed out-of-parlour.
- Purchase concentrate based on UFL value, targeting a value of >0.94 UFL per kg as fed
- Ration crude protein should be 16%, if grass intake is around 7 to 10kg per day. If the herd is placed on silage full-time than a high energy ration of 18+% will be needed in the short term.
- Be careful not to overfeed magnesium.

Hints and tips on feeding out forage supplements in dry weather

Once available daily grass is known, some options for feeding are:

- Separate a portion of the herd and place on 100% silage plus meal in the shed or a convenient paddock. This may be a paddock marked for reseeding later in the year. A small area of fresh grass can be allocated to this group daily
- Offer silage to all cows in the grazing paddock, placing silage along perimeter fencing. Silage allocation should be calculated to balance available grass on the paddock daily.
- Hold part/all of the herd in the yard for silage feeding after milking and turn out after about 2 hours. Adequate space needed.
- High fibre straights can be offered PKE/hulls/pulp at a rate of 3 kg per cow. Some farms choose to feed these in mobile feed troughs in the field. Note that citrus pulp does not work well in this situation due to its lower NDF fibre content. Ensure full access to clean water.
- Whichever actions is chosen, it is vital act now to ensure that grass supply is rationed out as early as possible. Plan to supplement until 3-4 days after growth exceeds demand.

Decision rules on grazing silage crops

- Areas closed for silage and accessible for grazing with <2200kg DM covers may be grazed as a 'standing supplement'.
- Recent work on zero grazing in Northern Ireland showed a significant drop in milk yield where heavy swards (2500 kg DM) were cut and fed. The decision to zero graze should be based on pre-grazing yield.
- Overall, if silage swards have surpassed ideal pre-grazing herbage masses and are nearing cutting stage then it is preferable to leave for silage cutting at this stage.
- Main crop silage yields are quite good in many areas– take the opportunity to make first cut silage before quality begins to drop in early June. Second cut yields will be much better as a result.

Other Management Issues

- Do not neglect young stock. Total dry matter intake requirements are small relative to the milking herd but nonetheless adequate feed dry matter (2.0 to 2.2% of liveweight) must be offered daily.
- If silage must be fed for a few weeks in summer, complete an early fodder budget. This will allow plenty of time to take action if there is a risk of feed shortages later in the year.

World Bee Day

Wednesday the 20th May was World Bee Day.

Bees need flowers and on World Bee Day, Teagasc reminded farmers to allow space for common wildflowers to grow and flower on farms. Early in the year, bees get pollen and nectar from willow, hazel and primrose. Now, whitethorn, bluebells and dandelions are important, while later on blackberry, woodbine and heather will feed the bees. With its late flowers, ivy is the last source of food at the end of the year. A diversity of common flowering plants is needed in hedgerows, field margins, field corners, along farm roadways and around farmyards. The quest for neatness should not override ecological considerations. Allow plants to flower before cutting. A current cultural challenge is to get recognition that common 'weeds' are wildflowers which may (or may not) be growing in the wrong place. The only plants which are universally undesirable are Invasive Alien Species such as Japanese Knotweed; while noxious weeds (ragwort, thistle, docks, male wild hop, common barberry and wild oats) must be controlled under the Noxious Weeds Act.

Recent research by Catherine Keena, Teagasc Countryside Management Specialist, found that farmers were positive towards biodiversity, but understanding of biodiversity was relatively poor, in particular: the value of common habitats; how species decline relates to individual farms; and how the absence of a 'silent spring' analogy masks serious declines. Biodiversity is one of the principal public goods to which agriculture can contribute. The All Ireland Pollinator Plan is an initiative bringing farmers, local authorities, schools, gardeners, and businesses together to try to create an Ireland where bees can survive and thrive. Teagasc supports the All Ireland Pollinator Plan <https://pollinators.ie/media/world-bee-day-2020/>

In a Teagasc video released this week, Aoife Leader, Teagasc Walsh Scholar explains the importance of bees to the environment and biodiversity on Irish farms. Aoife identifies the simple measures farmers can take to help protect bees on their farm.

To view this video, open the camera on your phone, place it over the icon below and automatically the link to the video will appear on screen. Simply click on the link and view the video.

