

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 3rd July 2020

Managing Grass from Now On

Following recent rain grass has started to grow again in most areas. What is the best way to manage the grass growth? Grass 10 advisor John Douglas has advice on keeping the focus on quality.

For those farms where grass growth has improved, aim to graze covers 1200-1400kg DM / ha. Remove supplementation when cover/LU is 160-180 kg DM/Cow or there are 12 days ahead. Focus back to getting as much grass into animals as possible.

Farmers shouldn't "Build Grass" where growth has picked up but continue to walk and measure their farms to monitor growth and if it declines again - then hold the cover. Going beyond 200 kg DM/Cow (16 days ahead) will reduce quality of grass swards which are already stressed and, from talking to farmers, already struggling with quality.

In a lot of cases grass quality on farms has deteriorated due to presence of seed heads and the grass wedge has been flattened due to a period of restricted growth. It is important to walk the farm twice this week following rain as higher than normal soil temperatures and fertiliser spread usually means a burst of growth.

Getting quality back into poor grass swards will require a few different approaches. It will take a couple of weeks or maybe a rotation to fully get back on track. Trying to do it too quickly will result in a further flattening of the wedge and reduced growth rates. So it is important to find a balance.

Here are a few suggestions.

1. If growth is exceeding demand and cover/cow >180 kg DM/ha (>14 days) and you estimate it will continue then use this opportunity to remove the worst quality paddocks as surplus bales. This is the preferred option and should be done immediately to get quality grass back into rotation.
2. But we realise not everyone has the luxury of this. So graze covers 1000-1200 kg DM/ ha to 4cm. If struggling to graze to 4cm make sure you are not over allocating grass or feeding too much supplement. On a 36hr paddock use a strip-wire at the back of the paddock to save about 15% of the area which can be removed on the 3rd grazing to allow cows get some fresh grass which should encourage them to graze out the rest of the paddock to 4cm.
3. Poorest quality swards should be grazed as best they can to reach 4cm using techniques above and aim to remove as surplus bales in the next rotation. If possible it is a good idea to graze these paddocks in-situ with after-grass so animals are still getting some high quality forage into the diet.
4. Avoid pre-mowing and topping heavy covers this wastes grass and slows down the regrowth. More than likely if you have heavy covers, you have too much grass, aim to remove this surplus as silage bales.
5. Where a farm has experienced a period of low growth followed by a period of normal/high growth they may have a flat grass wedge. This means many of paddocks have a similar cover. Don't be afraid to start grazing these paddocks at covers of 1,000 kg DM / ha as within 3 – 4 days the pre-grazing yield will increase to 1,400 kg DM / ha. Slowing the rotation and waiting until these covers reach 1,400 kg DM / ha will only result in grazing a high pre-grazing yield which has more stem, is less digestible and harder to graze out.

Use the next few weeks to get back to grazing quality grass, improve animal performance and catch up. Walk the farm twice weekly and take the guess work out of managing and make decisions as soon as possible. Use the Predicted Wedge function on PastureBase to give you more confidence in your

decisions. Also 1 unit N per acre per day should be applied to make the most of grass growth. (20units N/ac per rotation)

National Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP)

The National Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) Interim Report 2018 – 2019 was launched by Teagasc recently and it outlines the key measures that farmers and ASSAP advisors have agreed to improve water quality on individual farms. The report can be found under publications on www.teagasc.ie.

Many of these actions involve little or no cost to the farmer and only involve a change in some farm practices that put improving water quality of nearby streams front and centre. For each issue identified, there are a number of practical preventative actions that farmers can implement to alleviate any problems. These options are discussed in detail with the farmer and the most appropriate preventative actions are selected. These actions form the basis for the farm plan and a time frame to complete these actions is agreed between the advisor and the farmer. In some situations, advisors may recommend multiple preventative actions for an issue identified on a farm. Information on the type of preventative actions recommended to farmers for the 20 most frequent issues identified are outlined in the report.

Preventing Phosphorus Loss through Overland Flow

- Included in the agreed actions with farmers to prevent phosphorus losses to nearby watercourses are:
- Draw up and implement a Nutrient Management Plan for the farm and abide by the limits of Nitrogen and Phosphorus set out in the plan.
- Actively keep out the recommended distances from open drains, streams and rivers when applying bag fertiliser, slurry or dung.
- Make sure you are applying the correct rate of fertiliser at any time.
- Management of areas of the farm where water flowing over the land enters into open land drains or streams, known as Critical Source Areas (CSA's), is vital to prevent phosphorus losses on the farm. An example of this would be where a field or part of a field slopes towards a watercourse at one or several points. This is often a lag in the field or at the edge of a field.
- Farm roadways can also be a source of P loss to waterways and the design and building of roadways is critical to prevent it.
- On black or peat soils, of which we have many, should only receive maintenance dressing of phosphorus during the growing season as they cannot retain phosphorus.