

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 21st February 2020

Grassland

Calving is progressing well on dairy and suckler farms in the region and getting animals out to grass for a few hours every day is very beneficial for the animals and the farmer. Grazing conditions are made very difficult with storms Ciara and Denis bringing heavy rainfall and high winds in the last week. Heavier land is very wet and will need a dry week to squeeze up even to allow on/off grazing. Some farmers with dry land have turned stock out on the good days and have done very little damage. In these conditions being flexible in your approach and using all the available technologies and methods of getting cows out while also minimising poaching to paddocks will be necessary.

The Spring Rotation Planner

The spring rotation planner is a simple tool that every farmer can use to ensure that all of the available grazing area is grazed between early February and the 1st week of April without running out of ground. It divides the area into ever increasing fractions so that as more cows are calved, the daily allowance of ground increases week by week. The key target is to have grazed 30% of the available grazing area by the 1st of March and two thirds by the St. Patricks day. This can still be achieved even with the current weather conditions; farmers should target low covers and drier ground on the good days. Low covers allow you graze through the ground a bit quicker to achieve the 30% target. When it is dry overhead, cows that are turned out with appetite generally graze for 3 hours and then begin to look for water and a dry lie down to chew the cud. When weather and ground conditions are bad, water is not an issue but the cow will do a lot of walking and poaching trying to find a dry lie. Cows are smart and instinctive animals and know that there is a nice dry cubicle bed back in the shed. They will also gather at the gap to come back in, doing a lot of damage in the process. So you either have to go out for the cows after three hours and bring them back in or as many farmers do, leave the gap open so that they can come back in when they are finished grazing. Some farmers have installed automatic gap that pop open after three hours to leave the cows in. The Met Eireann App on the smart phone has hourly, daily and weekly satellite images that show when rain is due and it can be very useful, as many farmers do, to use this technology to make the decision to turn cows out in the morning or wait until the rain has passed and turn them out later in the day.

Farm Infrastructure

For early and late grazing, good farm infrastructure in terms of roadways; location of water troughs; multiple gaps along the roadways and gates in the farmyard is critical to move cows efficiently from the yard to the paddocks and back again. Many farmers use temporary narrow pathways at the edge of paddocks and combine this with back fencing to prevent damage from cows moving from one allocation to the next in a paddock. This is a really good method of prevent excess damage to paddocks. Remember once the cows have grazed an area, rain will lodge in the hoof marks and cows that have to travel across this to a fresh allocation will do even more poaching damage with the second and third crossing. These temporary pathways generally recover fully later in the spring and summer. Some may have to be levelled and reseeded later on.

Teagasc have three Podcasts called "The Dairy Edge" www.teagasc.ie/thedairyedge , "OviCast" www.teagasc.ie/ovicastpodcast for Sheep and "The Beef Edge" www.teagasc.ie/thebeefedge . These are weekly 15-20 minute recordings from Teagasc advisors, researchers, advisors and farmers on a wide range of topics.

