

# Spring Grassland Management

Edition 1

Spring Management Series 2023



## Farmer Focus



**Kevin & Enda Farrell**  
**Corobolla, Ballymahon, Co. Longford**

### Farm Profile

**Start Date of Calving:** 1st February

**% of herd calved:** 49%

**Opening Farm Cover:** 904 kg DM/ha  
(12th February)

**Platform Stocking Rate:** 3.22 cows/ha

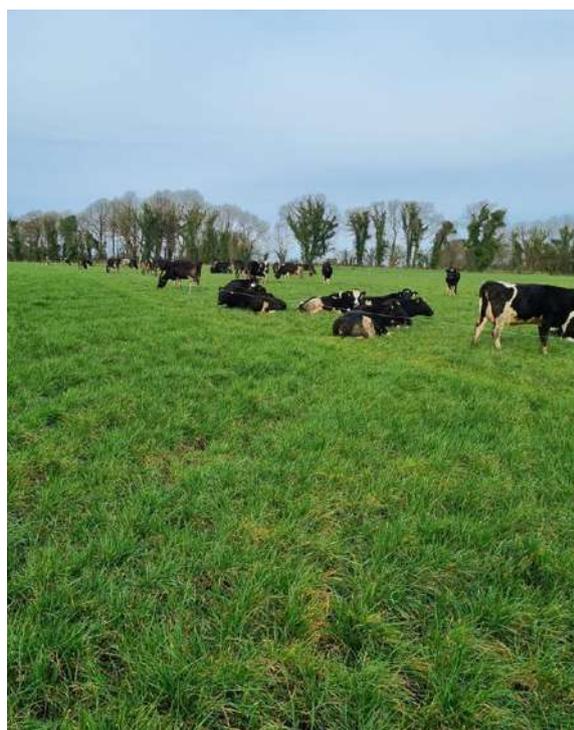
We don't mind grazing extra ground in February and early March so as to ensure we have good grass supply for the start of the second rotation in April. With the Opening Farm Cover lower than we would like at 904 kg DM/ha, we will have to reintroduce silage to the diet once again, but we'll wait until grazing conditions are less favourable before we do this".

### Spring Grazing Plan

With an opening farm cover of 904 kg DM/ha, Kevin & Enda have set out their Spring Rotation Plan (SRP) and began grazing on 3rd February. Kevin and Enda started grazing lighter covers of 800-1,000kg DM/ha to ensure excellent graze outs while conditioning the cows to resume graze. With favourable weather conditions in early February, the opportunity to graze some of the heavier paddocks was taken therefore retaining their drier areas for when grazing conditions deteriorate.

### Spring Rotation Planner

"We have to get 2.5ha (6ac) grazed each week for the first three weeks in the rotation planner, to ensure sufficient grass to start the second rotation in early April. With cows grazing full-time since 11th February, and half the herd calved in the first two weeks of calving, we'll surpass our grazing targets.





## Farmer Focus (Continued)

Week	Target HA Grazed/Day	Target HA Grazed By Weekend	Actual HA Grazed By Weekend	Target %	Actual %
03/02/2023-09/02/2023	0.34	2.36		5	
10/02/2023-16/02/2023	0.37	4.94	3.33	10	<b>6</b>
17/02/2023-23/02/2023	0.41	7.79		16	
24/02/2023-02/03/2023	0.45	10.97		23	
03/03/2023-09/03/2023	0.51	14.57		30	
10/03/2023-16/03/2023	0.59	18.72		39	
17/03/2023-23/03/2023	0.70	23.62		49	
24/03/2023-30/03/2023	0.85	29.59		62	
31/03/2023-06/04/2023	1.09	37.23		78	
07/04/2023-13/04/2023	1.52	47.81		100	

### Nutrient Use on Farm

When fertiliser planning, Kevin and Enda plan to maximise the nutrient value of their slurry, and compliment this with chemical Nitrogen where needed. Slurry will be targeted at silage fields, low index soils, and on paddocks that the cows will have grazed in February/early March. "Typically slurry would be spread using LESS on paddocks with covers below 700kg DM/Ha, but with excellent grazing conditions we have decided to also spread paddocks after grazing where conditions allow at the rate of 2,500 gallons/acre". Kevin and Enda also plan to spread ½ bag of Protected Urea (23 units / acre) on the paddocks with heavier covers that haven't received slurry and won't be grazed until later in the first rotation, to ensure the quality of these swards doesn't deteriorate over the spring.



## A Good Start

With the spring calving season kicking off, combining with excellent grazing conditions in early February, the 2023 grazing season is underway on a lot of farms. Decisions made on farm this month surrounding getting cows to grass will directly impact the grazed grass utilised, and the quality of the sward grazed subsequently.

### Benefits of Early Grazing

1. **Increased cow performance**
2. **Reconditions the grass swards for the grazing season ahead**
3. **Reduces supplementation levels**
4. **Sets the herd up for the upcoming breeding season**



Every extra day spent grazing in spring is worth an additional **€4.00 per cow per day**, this figure is due to the economic return of all the benefits outlined.

**i.e. 100 cows X €4.00 = €400 per day**

## Principles of Spring Grazing

- 1 **Feed the cow correctly** - in order to achieve this, a freshly calved cow should remain indoors for 3-4 days before entering the main grazing herd. Cow intakes increase weekly to peak approximately 10 weeks post calving. It is important to correctly allocate grass to ensure the cow is always adequately fed. Where grass intakes are restricted high quality silage and concentrates should make up the remainder of the diet.
- 2 **Limit poaching** - it's inevitable a level of poaching will occur at stages throughout the spring. The target should be to limit these incidences through correct management and paddock selection outlined below. Paddocks that have suffered a level of damage will fully recover where good soil fertility and high levels of perennial ryegrass are present.
- 3 **Hit your residual** - grazing paddocks to 3.5 - 4.0cm will ensure high quality regrowth's limiting dead material. These shall be achieved when **1)** Cows settle into grazing after the 1st week, **2)** When the cows have the correct appetite, aim to have their silage allocation finished before the morning milking, **3)** Their allocation of grass is correct and **4)** As weather/ground conditions improve.
- 4 **Follow your spring rotation plan** - target to graze at least 1/3 of the area should be grazed by end of February (10th March on heavier soils) and 2/3 of the area by mid-March (31st March on heavier soils). The remainder is then grazed before the second rotation commences in early to mid-April depending on adequate grass supply.



## Preparing for the Wet Day

While grazing conditions have been excellent during early February, it is important to have a plan in place to continue grazing when conditions deteriorate. While there is no substitute for excellent grazing infrastructure there are various different grazing management practices that can be implemented to reduce the chances of poaching occurring when grazing in difficult conditions.

## Paddock Selection

- ▶ **Soil type** - The ideal paddocks will be the driest area of the platform. On heavier farms, this may not always mean that the full paddock is grazed at this point, an area of the paddock may have to be left to a later date until ground conditions are more favourable.
- ▶ **Grazing infrastructure** - identify paddocks with good grazing infrastructure and multiple entrances. Paddock depth should not be more than twice paddock width. Ideally the furthest point in the paddock should not be more than 100m from the roadway
- ▶ **Grass Cover** - It is important to graze covers of 800-1200kg DM/Ha in poor conditions or early in the 1st round, this ensures adequate intakes and better clean outs.

## On/Off grazing

- ▶ Standing cows off for an hour after milking often helps to increase appetite. Cows can consume 5-6kgDM in a single 3 – 4 hour grazing bout before returning to the shed. This process insures grazing continues on farms during difficult conditions.

## Spur Roadways

- ▶ These are used to gain access to paddocks with poor grazing infrastructure leading to them, or to extend existing roadways to the back of the paddocks to avoid walking the herd across already grazed ground.

Correct Allocation	
Herd	<b>20 Cows</b>
Grass intakes	<b>5 kg DM</b>
Herd Demand	
20 X 5kg DM	<b>100kg DM</b>
Field Grass Cover	<b>900kg DM/Ha</b>
100 ÷ 900	<b>0.11Ha per grazing</b>
0.11Ha X 10,000m <sup>2</sup>	<b>1,111m<sup>2</sup></b>
1,111m <sup>2</sup> / 33m (Paddock Depth)	<b>34m</b>
<b>Allocate 33m x 34m</b>	

## Allocations

- ▶ Keep allocations as square as possible to reduce cows walking. The following example lays out an allocation for 20 cows in early spring.

## Adding Value this Spring

Come along to our Spring Grassland workshops

**TOPICS**

- ▶ Getting cows out to grass
- ▶ Feeding the cow correctly
- ▶ Fertiliser and nutrient management advice
- ▶ Making quality silage

**DATES / LOCATIONS**

**21st February**  
*James Hoey, Drumcar, Dunleer, Co. Louth A92 W992*

**23rd February**  
*Michael Clarke, Gaybrook, Mullingar, Co Westmeath N91 VH99*

**28th February**  
*Raymond Brady, Cloncovid, Kilcogy, Co. Cavan N39 KR60*

**2nd March**  
*Edward Treanor, Bishopscourt, Clones, Co. Monaghan H23 N728*

**Start Time - 11:30 am**      [www.lakeland.ie](http://www.lakeland.ie)






## Joint Development Programme

Lakeland Dairies/Teagasc Joint Development Programme has produced this Spring Management Series. Our advisors are currently available by phone to discuss all farm related matters.

- ▶ Susan Casey 087 099 5359
- ▶ Owen McPartland 087 330 2254
- ▶ Michael Monahan 087 188 3803