

Spring Grassland Management

Edition 1

Spring Management Series 2024



Farmer Focus



Dermot Heaney
Kilberry, Co. Meath

Farm Profile

Start Date of Calving: 30th January

% of herd calved: 54%

Opening Farm Cover: 916 kg DM/ha
(30th January)

Platform Stocking Rate: 2.6 cows/Ha

Spring Grazing Plan

With an opening farm cover of 916 kg DM/Ha, Dermot has set out his Spring Rotation Plan (SRP) and began grazing on the 26th of January. Dermot started grazing lighter covers of 800-1,000kg DM/Ha to ensure excellent graze outs while conditioning the cows to resume grazing. "With unfavourable weather conditions in early February, we have taken every opportunity to graze. Cows are grazing for two bouts every day and being housed at night where fresh 78% DMD red clover silage is offered adlib."

Spring Rotation Planner

"We have to get 6.5Ha (16ac) 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 since the 26th of January, and half the herd calved in the first two weeks of calving, we need to



ensure two bouts of grazing is achieved each day in order to get through our area. With a platform stocking rate of 2.6 cows/Ha it will be a challenge to achieve our spring rotation planner goals, but we are hopeful that grazing conditions will improve and cows can begin grazing fulltime. With an AFC of 916kg DM/Ha we will need to reintroduce silage into the diet in Mid-March, we will determine how much silage is required with a grass walk closer to the tie".





Farmer Focus (Continued)

Week	Target HA Grazed/Day	Target HA Grazed By Weekend	Actual HA Grazed By Weekend	Target %	Actual %
26/01/2024-01/02/2024	0.46	3.23		4	
02/02/2024-08/02/2024	0.50	6.73		9	
09/02/2024-15/02/2024	0.55	10.57		14	
16/02/2024-22/02/2024	0.61	14.82		20	
23/02/2024-29/02/2024	0.68	19.57		26	
01/03/2024-07/03/2024	0.77	24.96		33	
08/03/2024-14/03/2024	0.89	31.19		41	
15/03/2024-21/03/2024	1.05	38.55		51	
22/03/2024-28/03/2024	1.29	47.58		63	
29/03/2024-04/04/2024	1.66	59.21		78	
05/04/2024-11/04/2024	2.34	75.56		100	

Nutrient Use on Farm

When fertiliser planning, Dermot plans to maximise the nutrient value of his slurry, and compliment this with chemical Nitrogen where needed. Slurry will be targeted at silage fields, lower index soils, and on paddocks that the cows will have grazed in February/early March. "We have spread 1/3 of the grazing platform with 3,000gallons/acre of very dilute lagoon slurry on the 20th of January. We plan to blanket spread 20 units of Protected Urea on the milking platform if soil temperature and weather conditions allow. We plan to follow the cows after grazing with this dilute slurry aiming to deliver a further 10units of N to the sward."



A start must be made

With the spring calving season kicking well under way on most farms attention should now be focused on spring grazing. Difficult grazing conditions in early February means the 2024 grazing season has been slow to start on a lot of farms. Decisions made on farm this month surrounding getting cows to grass will directly impact animal performance and ultimately profitability. It is of upmost importance to ensure at least one grazing is achieved each day, in order to increase milk quality and quantity delivered by the herd.

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 soil fertility are good 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 farm area by March 10th - 17th and 2/3 of the area by 31st March. The remainder is then grazed before the second rotation commences on the 12th - 20th April depending on adequate grass supply.



Preparing for the Wet Day

While grazing conditions have been challenging during February, it is important to make every effort to get cows to grass. 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 in order to limit poaching. 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	20 Cows
Grass intakes	5 kg DM
Herd Demand	
20 X 5kg DM	100kg DM
Field Grass Cover	900kg DM/Ha
100 ÷ 900	0.11Ha per grazing
0.11Ha X 10,000m ²	1,111m²
1,111m ² / 33m (Paddock Depth)	34m
Allocate 33m x 34m	

Allocations

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

Get the most from Your Grass this Spring

Join us for these Spring Grassland Workshops

TOPICS

- ▶ Getting cows out to grass - ensuring the cow is fed correctly
- ▶ How to start grass measuring?
- ▶ Fertiliser and nutrient management advice
- ▶ Making quality silage

DATES / LOCATIONS

Tuesday 27th February
Sean Murtagh,
Rathconrath, Mullingar,
Co. Westmeath N91 EE04

Friday 1st March
Noel Ruxton,
Carrickacreeney, Shercock,
Co.Cavan A81 VP11

Wednesday 6th March
Raymond Niblock,
Carnroe, Scotshouse,
Co.Monaghan H23 KH31

Start Time
- 11:30 am

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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