

Spring Grassland Management

Edition 2

Spring Management Series 2023



Farmer Focus



Kevin & Enda Farrell
Corobolla, Ballymahon, Co. Longford

Farm Profile

Start Date of Calving: 1st February

% of herd calved: 82%

Opening Farm Cover: 891 kg DM/ha

Platform Stocking Rate: 3.22 cows/ha

With a farm cover of 891kg DM/ha recorded on 28th February, the grass budget indicated that silage needed to be fed in order to ensure sufficient grass on 13th April to start the second rotation. "With the excellent grazing conditions we decided to continue grazing, until grazing conditions deteriorated, before starting to feed silage once again, so as to reduce the risk of poaching occurring".

With 82% of the herd calved, and cow intakes increasing week on week, the Farrells have found themselves ahead of their spring rotation planner.

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	4.62	10	9
17/02/2023-23/02/2023	0.41	7.79	9.55	16	19
24/02/2023-02/03/2023	0.45	10.97	15.68	23	32
03/03/2023-09/03/2023	0.51	14.57	18.9	30	39
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	



Farmer Focus (Continued)

“Overall so far the spring has been excellent, with excellent grazing conditions allowing for an easier transition for the cow back to grazing. This minimised BCS loss, and already the effects are visible with high numbers of cows each week resuming cycling post calving”.

Milk Recording for SCC success

Kevin and Enda completed their first milk recording of the season on 13th March. Bulk tank SCC has been between 120,000 – 150,000 this spring. “Once the milk recording results are returned, Enda will identify the high SCC cows, and distinguish which quarter is high and treat accordingly, in order to reduce the SCC to below 100,000.

“By completing our first milk recording within 6 weeks of the first cow calving, this allows accurate reports to be generated for us to assess how successful the dry cow therapy/period was”.



Tipping the grass grazed scales

With favourable grazing conditions throughout February and early March, many farms are now either on target or within touching distance of targeted percentage grazed within their **Spring Rotation Planner** (SRP). With unsettled weather in the previous week, all efforts must be made to sustain a level grass in the diet, and to achieve 66% of the platform grazed by March 20th (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils).

Grazing Success

Following a series of spring grazing management workshops held across the Lakeland Dairies catchment, it was evident attendees had varying levels of the platform grazed. Where farms are on target with their SRP, continue to follow the SRP and the spring grass budget on Pasturebase. Keep your area grazed up to date, and complete two grass walks before early April, to monitor both grass growth and grass availability.

Cleaning up for quality in 2023

Farms that failed to reach their target of 33% grazed by the end of February (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils), must ensure corrective action is taken to increase the % area grazed, while still ensuring high levels of grass utilisation. In order to reach your farm’s next SRP target of 66% grazed by 20th March (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils):

- ▶ Displace some silage from the diet with grazed grass. During difficult weather conditions on/off grazing, spur roads, and back fencing can aid in keeping grass as the majority of the diet. Ensuring cows graze twice daily can therefore afford a reduction in the silage fed.
- ▶ Target lighter covers of 900-1100Kg DM/Ha. With intakes increasing every week post calving, more area can be grazed while meeting residual targets.

Surpassing Expectations

For the minority of farms that have surpassed their SRP, they need to assess grass availability on the farm immediately. Where shortages are identified within the grass budget, reintroducing some silage into the diet will be required to reduce grass demand. This may only be for a short period of time (7-14 days), this ensures grass supply in early-mid April. It's important to react to this problem immediately on farms so as to ensure cows are grazing full-time, gaining BCS, and resumed cyclicity ahead of the start of the second rotation.

Monitoring Grass Supply

While getting your targeted area grazed off is key, monitoring the grass supply on the farm is key to managing the start of the second rotation. It's important to monitor the grass supply on your first 3 or 4 paddocks grazed and ensure there is between 400-500 Kg DM/Ha regrowths on these paddocks today, in order to have sufficient grass on the farm to start the second rotation in early to mid-April.

Planning for Silage Excellence

Excellent quality (75% DMD+) silage is required to feed the milking cow in the shoulders of the grazing season, while good quality dry cow silage is required to increase BCS over the dry period.

Preparation for quality silage begins now;

Step 1: Getting silage ground - either on the milking platform or out blocks - grazed off by 25th March.

Step 2: Get Cattle slurry spread via dribble bar or trailing shoe on the silage ground at a rate of 2500 - 3,000 gallons/ac. Providing approximately 27:15:90 units of N:P:K respectively to the silage crop.

Step 3: Follow the fertiliser advice in the table below to provide adequate nutrient to the silage crop. Use Protected Urea as a Nitrogen source, and have Nitrogen fertiliser applied to the crop by 8th April.

Table 2. N, P & K requirements for 1st cut grass silage (5 t/ha DM) & suggested fertiliser programmes

Soil Index	N kg/ha (units/ac)	P kg/ha (units/ac)	K kg/ha (units/ac)	Suggested fertiliser options at silage closing time ^{3, 4}	
				No slurry ¹ (0 gal/ac)	+ Cattle slurry 33m ³ /ha ⁵ (@ 3,000 gal/ac)
1 ¹	100 (80)	40 (32)	175 (140)	432 kg/ha (3.5 bgs/ac) 13-6-20 115 kg/ha (0.9 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S	175 kg/ha (1.4 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S
2 ¹	100 (80)	30 (24)	155 (120)	432 kg/ha (3.5 bgs/ac) 13-6-20 115 kg/ha (0.9 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S	175 kg/ha (1.4 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S
3	100 (80)	20 (16)	125 (100)	371 kg/ha (3.0 bgs/ac) 13-6-20 136 kg/ha (1.6 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S	175 kg/ha (1.4 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S
4 ²	100 (80)	0	0	265 kg/ha (2.1 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S	No slurry P & K needed at Index 4 265 kg/ha (2.1 bgs/ac) ProUrea+S

1 Index 1, 2 & 3 soils apply P & K balance to build / maintain soil P & K levels to after grass for example apply as 18-6-12 / 0-7-30 / Cattle slurry / etc. 2 Index 4 soils omit P for 2/3 years & retest, index 4 K omit for 1 year and revert to index 3 advice thereafter until next soil test. Don't apply cattle on Index 4 soils. 3 For re-seeded / older swards with higher / lower yield potential increase/reduce N, P, K by 25 kg N, 4 kg P & 25 kg K per tonne of grass (DM) increase or decrease in target yield. 4 ProUrea + S = Protected Urea (Urea 38% N + 7.5% S + NBPT or 2-NPT or NPPT). 5 Cattle slurry (6.3% DM) assumed to be applied by low emission techniques (LESS) - Slurry N-P-K equivalent to a 50 kg bag of 9-5-32 fertiliser

Always adhere to the recommendations set out by the nitrates directive, in relation to fertiliser applications.

What are the options to reduce grass demand at herd level?

1. Feed the whole herd some silage every day but continue grazing twice daily.
2. Feed silage to the herd during unfavourable grazing condition. For example, house cows 2 to 3 wet nights during the week.
3. Where feed space is limiting, but ground conditions remain favourable, house and feed silage to 3 rows of cows per milking. These housed cows can be alternated at each milking - e.g., milk the housed cows first, and house the last 3 rows of cows per milking.

P & K Build Up

Apply additional P & K (soil build up rates) after 1st cut silage or in late summer.

Don't Forget Sulphur (S)

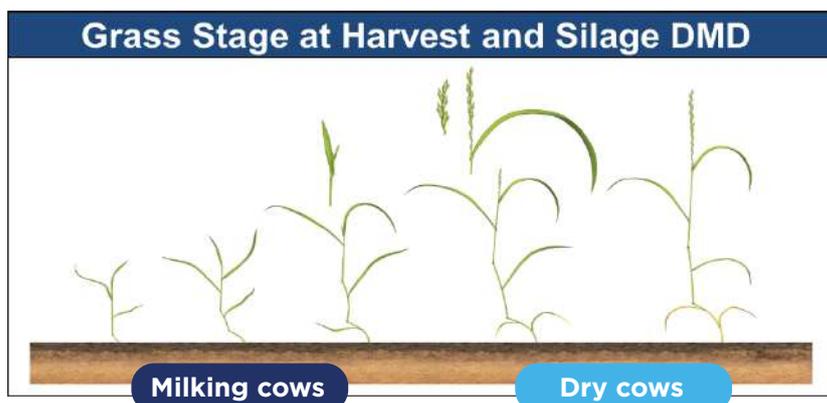
A silage crop requires 20Kg S/ Ha per cut. This application will improve grass DM yields and quality, as it increases N efficiency. Silage or in late summer.

Max Potassium (K) Application

Spreading over 90Kg/ha K can reduce fertilised K efficiency. Where more than 90Kg/ha is advised; only 90Kg should be applied in the spring, and the remainder after silage is cut or in late autumn.

Step 4: Cutting date, by following these steps, the planned cutting date for this silage crop should be 20th May. Silage should be cut and wilted for no longer than 12-24hrs, which will result in 75% DMD silage, weather permitting.

When walking silage crops, see the diagram below illustrating the different growth stages of the plant and resulting silage quality from cutting at each of these stages.



Value of Slurry

To make best use of this valuable fertiliser, it's important to have an understanding of the nutrient content of the slurry on your farm. This can be done with the use of a slurry hydrometer (pictured) to determine the dry matter percentage and subsequently using the table below estimate the nutrient content of the slurry.

Dry Matter (DM) %	Units/1,000 gals			Kg/1,000 gals		
	N	P	K	N	P	K
3	5	3	17	2.4	1.3	8.6
4	6	3	21	2.9	1.7	10.4
5	7	4	25	3.6	2.0	12.3
6	9	5	29	4.4	2.4	14.5
7	10	6	33	4.9	2.8	16.3
8	11	6	36	5.6	3.1	18.2
9	12	7	40	6.2	3.5	20
10	14	8	45	6.9	3.8	22.2

Figures are calculated on 40% of available N from cattle slurry. P & K is calculated at 100% availability. However, for slurry applied to index 1 & 2 soils the availability of P is at 50%, therefore the value of P is taken as half the value reported.



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

Adding Value this Breeding Season



Evening Workshops



The purpose of any breeding programme is to produce a cow that will maximise profitability for a farmer. It has been consistently shown that improving the cow's genetic merit, in addition to nutrition, health and proper management, can play a vital role in improving productivity.

With this in mind the Lakeland Dairies/Teagasc joint programme is hosting two evening workshops with the following topics to be covered on each night:

- ▶ The current state of play across Lakeland Dairies herds - Owen McPartland Teagasc/Joint Programme
- ▶ Breeding a cow suitable for all systems - Joe Patton Head of Dairy Knowledge Transfer Teagasc
- ▶ Your breeding plan - what to consider? Susan Casey/Michael Monahan Lakeland Dairies Joint programme
 - *Sire selection - what to look out for?*
 - *Cow Selection - picking the cows to get dairy AI.*
 - *What role has sexed semen to play in your breeding plan?*
 - *Improving the quality of your beef calves.*

Each event will start at **7:30 pm**

20th March – Feerick's Hotel, Rathowen, Co. Westmeath

21st March – Errigal Hotel, Cootehill, Co. Cavan

Speak to one of the Joint Programme Advisors to discuss your own independent breeding plan.

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