Spring Grassland Management

Edition 3

Spring Management Series 2024

Joint Development Programme

Farmer Focus

Dermot Heaney
Kilberry, Co. Meath

Farm Profile

Start Date of Calving: 30th January

% of herd calved: 99%

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

Platform Stocking Rate: 2.6 cows/Ha

With 1% of the herd remaining to calve in April, herd demand is increasing steadily as the herd's average days in milk increase. "We began the second rotation on the 3rd April, we were ahead of our spring rotation planner since mid-March, which resulted in us feeding silage for 6 nights to ensure sufficient grass to begin the second rotation."

Herd performance has continued to increase steadily over the past number of weeks to 2.01kg Ms/cow/day currently. Protein has decreased to 3.47% in the latest test, and this is being attributed to the feeding of silage to slow the end of the first rotation.

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	2.90	9	**3**
09/02/2024-15/02/2024	0.55	10.57	6.31	14	**8**
16/02/2024-22/02/2024	0.61	14.82	13.12	20	**17**
23/02/2024-29/02/2024	0.68	19.57	26.39	26	**33**
01/03/2024-07/03/2024	0.77	24.96	34.51	33	**44**
08/03/2024-14/03/2024	0.89	31.19	42.74	41	**54**
15/03/2024-21/03/2024	1.05	38.55	51.28	51	**65**
22/03/2024-28/03/2024	1.29	47.58	60.24	63	**77**
29/03/2024-04/04/2024	1.66	59.21	77.23	78	**98**
05/04/2024-11/04/2024	2.34	75.56	87.75	100	**112**

Preparing for Silage Success

"On the red clover silage areas, we zero grazed these areas in the end of the 2023 grazing season. So far this year we targeted compound fertiliser for the red clover swards due to be unable to get slurry to these areas, the plan was for these areas to be topped up with Nitrogen with 46 units of Protected Urea, but this will have to be scaled back now to allow cutting in early May. Silage areas on the platform have received slurry and will be topped up with 60 units of Protected Urea this week. We aim to run the milking platform at a mid-season stocking rate of 3.6 cows/Ha, this will allow us to close up to 20Ha for silage, while leaving scope for reseeding."

Getting back on track

With grazing conditions deteriorating through-out March and early April, huge efforts must be made to set the farm up for the beginning of the second rotation. Where grazing conditions have forced farms to fall behind their Spring Rotation Planner (SRP), all efforts must be made to ensure grazed grass is the majority of the diet going forward, while still ensuring high levels of grass utilisation. Displace some silage from the diet with grazed grass, through ensuring cows graze twice daily. During difficult weather conditions on/off grazing, spur roads, and back fencing can aid in keeping grass as the majority of the diet.

In the case where only 0-30% of the milking platform has been grazed to date, the grass wedge must be inverted and cows must graze the paddocks in the middle of the grass wedge with covers of 1,000-1,200 kg DM/Ha. From this the herd will graze to the top of the wedge. In this case it is likely the first rotation will not be finished and there will be 15-30% of the milking platform to be cut for surplus in late April/early May. To ensure smooth transition into the second rotation in this case, weekly grass measurements are key, in order to identify the correct time to start the second rotation. Once this happens ½ of what is left to graze should be cut for silage, and once grass supply in the second rotation is secure the rest of the first rotation should then be cut for surplus.

Where a shortage of grass in the feed budget has manifested due to insufficient grass regrowth's on the first paddocks grazed, grass demand must be reduced for a short period until grass covers allow for the finishing of the first and start of the second rotation.

When to start the second rotation?

Grass supply on the first paddocks grazed in early to mid-February will dictate the starting date of the second rotation on most farms. With grass covers reaching 1200-1400kg DM/Ha on the first 2-3 paddocks grazed, it is time to begin the second rotation. The start of the second rotation will coincide with magic day on the majority of farms which occurs between the 5-20th of April, depending on several factors listed below.

A bleeding of first and second rotation paddocks may be grazed together for some time to allow other second rotation paddocks to become available for grazing at the correct grass covers. From this rotation length and stock rate mid-season should be matched to growth rates on farms.

Key Management Tips

- Invert the wedge starting in 1,000 covers grazing twice daily. (On/Off grazing if needed)
- Finish the first rotation on the 25th – 1st May.
- Skip the heaviest 25-30% of the milking platform when second rotation is ready.
- Cut the skipped area Early May.
- To reduce the impact on cows' performance get some grass grazed every day.
- Regular measurement to decide when to start the second rotation.
- If you skip paddocks don't leave them for the first cut.

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 .e.g. house cows 2 to 3 wet nights during the week.
3. Where feed space is limiting, house and feed silage to 3 rows of cows per milking. These housed cows can be alternated at each milking.

What is Magic day?

Magic day is where grass growth surpasses grass demand per hectare on the farm.

What influences magic day on farm?

1. Milking Platform Stocking Rates.
2. Concentrate supplementation level.
3. Location.
4. Land type (Free draining or heavy soils).

Winter fodder budget

Silage stocks for next winter on dairy farms will be significantly impacted by what happens on farm over the course of the next few weeks. A rolling reserve of one month's silage per cow (equivalent of two bales) remains a core principle of managing risk on farm. With this in mind, adequate planning to secure enough winter feed is more important than ever.

When completing any silage budget it is important to examine previous winters along with planning for the current year. Records of how much silage you had left over this spring and answering the key questions below are critical for budgeting accuracy for winter 2024.

- Will there be more stock on-farm compared to last year?
- Will you end up cutting less area than last year?
- What is your fertiliser strategy for silage crops this year?

Once these key questions are answered you can carry out a simple budget for your own farm.

Where silage deficits exist on farm, action must be taken now to ensure adequate feed supply for the coming winter. Don't assume silage will be available to purchase later in the year. Selling poor performers, high SCC, lame or late calving cows has the potential to reduce any deficit or increase the reserve on farm.

Ensuring all replacements calve at 22-26mths, will not only reduce costs, but will increase silage reserves. By bring the Lakeland Average percentage of heifers calved at 22-26mths from 60% to 100% will result in a silage saving of 78 ton (fresh weight) per 100cows.

Please contact your local joint programme advisor should you require assistance in putting a fodder plan in place for your farm.

Correctly fertilised 1st cut crop should yield 10 ton per acre and a 2nd cut crop 7 ton per acre.

Ensuring winter forage supplies

*Some farms may have to start looking outside the farm gate to secure enough feed for winter 2024, standing crops of silage or other forage crops may be options open to some farms.

*Culling poor performing or problem cows now will result in an additional 25 ton (fresh weight) of silage in the yard per cow culled.

This is halved to 12.5 ton of a saving if these cows remain on farm until next September.

Fodder deficit = Milk record / review health records and cull the problem and lowest preforming cows.

Section 1. What Fodder is required on the Farm?

	A	B	C	
Animal Type	No. of Stock to be kept over Winter	Number of Months (Include a 4-6 week *reserve)*	Pit Silage Needed, tonnes / animal / month	Total Tonnes of Silage Needed Multiply (AxBxC)
Dairy cows			1.6	
0-1 year old			0.7	
1-2 year old			1.3	
2+ year old			1.3	
Total tonnes needed			D	
Total bales needed (tonnes multiplied by 1.25)			E	

Section 2. Calculate silage to be cut

i. Silage in the pit	Length x breadth x settled height) metres ÷1.35 =		Silage in the pit (t) F
ii. Pit silage to be cut	G	H	
	Area (acres)	Yield t/acre	Total yield (t) (GxH*)
1st cut			
2nd cut			
3rd cut			
	Total yield pit silage to be cut		I
iii. Bales	J	K	
	Number of bales	Yield / bale	Total yield (t) (JxK)
Surplus bales		0.8 t / bale	
	Total yield baled silage		L

Section 3. Calculate the surplus / deficit

Total silage demand (D) minus total silage produced (F, I, L) = D-F-I-L	
% deficit= (deficit in tonnes ÷ total demand in tonnes) x 100	

Lakeland DAIRIES

teagasc Agriculture and Food Development Authority

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