Spring Grassland Management

Lakeland DAIRIES

teagasc

Joint Development Programme

Edition 1

Spring Management Series 2025

Maximising peak production from grass

With the spring calving season underway, attention should now be focused on spring grazing. Difficult spring grazing conditions in 2024 hampered a lot of herds' performance throughout the spring and into peak milk production. Decisions made this month on getting cows to grass will either ensure a repeat of 2024 spring and peak production or an increase in milk quality and quantity delivered by the herd.

Principles of Spring Grazing

1 **Feed the cow correctly** – 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. 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. Paddocks will fully recover where soil fertility is good and high levels of perennial ryegrass are present.

3 **Hit your residual** - grazing paddocks to 4.0cm will ensure high quality regrowths limiting dead material. Residuals will be achieved when **1)** Cows settle into grazing after the 1st week, **2)** When the cows have the correct appetite, (conditioned to graze), **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 12th – 20th April depending on adequate grass supply.

Preparing for the Wet Day

While there is no substitute for excellent grazing infrastructure there are various different grazing management practices that can reduce poaching 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 the 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

- Cows can consume 5-6kgDM in a single 3 – 4 hour grazing bout before returning to the shed. This process ensures 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.

Allocations

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

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	**1,111m^2**
1,111m^2 / 33m (Paddock Depth)	**34m**
Allocate 33m x 34m	

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