

# Spring Grassland Management

## Spring Management Series 2021

Edition 1



Welcome to our Spring Management Series of advice, tips and information to help you get the best from your dairy enterprise over the Spring period and onwards. The series covers three main themes: Labour Efficiency & Spring Workload, Animal Health & Milk Quality and Spring Grassland Management. This is Edition 1 of the Spring Grassland Management theme.

### A Good Start

With the spring calving season kicking off, attention turns to how to best feed the herd and sustain production throughout the grazing season. Decisions made this month (February), around getting cows to grass, will directly impact the grazed grass utilised, and the quality of the sward grazed subsequently.

### Benefits of early spring grazing

- ▶ **Increased cow performance** - due to the increased nutritional density of the diet - by displacing silage with higher quality spring grass. A positive herd response (in kilos of milk solids produced) will be seen.
- ▶ **Reconditions the grass swards for the grazing season ahead** - Not only does early grazing increase the level of grass utilised by the herd but it also ensures that, by grazing off existing swards, there will be adequate levels of high quality grass available from mid-April onwards.
- ▶ **Reduces supplementation levels** - It is possible to lower concentrate feeding levels with adequate feeding levels of 3-4 kgs of a high quality ration and high levels of grass in the diet. The herd requires a ration with 16% crude protein content if both grass and silage are being fed, whereas 14% is more than adequate when grazing full-time.
- ▶ **Sets the herd up for the upcoming breeding season** - Ensuring the cow is grazing high quality grass will help to reduce negative energy balance, while minimising body condition loss. This then ultimately improves herd fertility.

Every extra day spent grazing in spring is worth an additional **€2.70 per cow per day**, this figure is due to the economic return of all the benefits outlined. **That's 100 cows X €2.70 = €270 per day.**



## Principles of spring grazing

- 1 Feed the cow correctly** – in order to achieve this, a freshly calved cow should remain indoors for 2-3 days before entering the main grazing herd. Cow intakes increase weekly to peak approximately 10 weeks post calving. Spring grazing will help ensure increased intakes are promoted, it is important to allocate grass correctly 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 that 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. Extensive trial work shows that paddocks suffering 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 – 4.0 cm will ensure high quality regrowths, limiting dead material. These will 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.



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## Spring Rotation Planner (SRP)

The basic principle of spring grazing should be to allow sufficient time for grass to regrow for the beginning of the second rotation, in early to mid-April.

A delayed start to grazing can result in a shortage of grass in the second rotation or a late finish to the first round, forcing cows to graze high covers of poor quality grass.

Following the spring rotation planner, at least 1/3rd of the area should be grazed by end of February (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils) and 2/3rds of the area by mid-March (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils).

The remainder is then grazed before the second rotation starts in early to mid-April. In our Farmer Focus section, you'll will see a SRP for Shaun Maguire who plans to start grazing on 3rd February, and finish his first rotation on the 13th of April.



## Top Tips for successful spring grazing

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

**1 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.

**2 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

**3 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. Cows should then return to the shed, this process can be repeated after the evening milking if you so wish. Otherwise high quality silage should be offered. 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.
- ▶ **Allocations** - Keep allocations as square as possible to reduce cows walking. The following example lays out an allocation for 50 cows in early spring.

| Correct Allocations                         |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| Herd:                                       | <b>50 Cows</b>            |
| Grass intakes:                              | <b>5 kg DM</b>            |
| Herd Demand                                 |                           |
| 50 x 5kg DM =                               | <b>250kg DM</b>           |
| Field Grass Cover:                          | <b>900Kg DM/Ha</b>        |
| 250 ÷ 900 =                                 | <b>0.28Ha per grazing</b> |
| 0.28Ha x 10,000m <sup>2</sup> =             | <b>2,800m<sup>2</sup></b> |
| 2800 m <sup>2</sup> / 55m (paddock depth) = | <b>51m</b>                |
| <b>Allocate 51m x 55m</b>                   |                           |





# Farmer Focus



**Shaun Maguire**  
**Tuberlion, Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan**

## Farm Profile

**Farm Size:** 80 Ha

**Cow Nos.:** 128 spring calving cows

**Platform stocking rate:** 3.1Lu/Ha

**Herd Performance:** 527KgMS, of 900kgs concentrate



## Grazing Preparation

The first farm walk (opening cover) was completed on 27th January resulting in a farm cover of **893Kg DM/Ha**. *"I'm disappointed with over winter growths. Soil samples have been taken to identify if there are any soil fertility issues"*.

From the farm cover, Shaun constructed a spring rotation plan, along with a grass budget for the spring ahead. *"The grass budget, and spring rotation planner work hand in hand, I know what area needs to be grazed per day and I can ensure adequate levels of grass will be offered throughout the first round."*

Suitable paddocks have been identified with excellent infrastructure to start the grazing season. Covers on these range from 750 - 900Kg DM/Ha. *"The lower covers will ensure adequate cow intakes and excellent residuals"*.

*"To ease workload, all fences were maintained, extra entrances created into paddocks and high traffic areas of the roadways were resurfaced to aid cow flow over the winter"*.

With an earlier than planned start to Shaun's calving season, full advantage was taken to kick off the grazing season in the final days of January.

## Benefits on farm

- ▶ **Cow Performance** - Shaun credits the increase in Kg Ms (50kg in last 2 yrs) to grazing earlier in the spring, resulting in higher quality swards throughout the grazing season.
- ▶ **Concentrate Reduction** - "Once I get them to twice a day grazing the cow will be lowered to 3kg of concentrate a day, and once the second rotation starts they will be lowered again".
- ▶ **Silage Demand** - one of the biggest cost savings is the reduced silage demand, "there's no point paying a contractor to make silage when the cows can be out grazing".
- ▶ **Cow Health** - "cows are in a much cleaner environment while out grazing, when compared to being housed, even though I clean, lime and sawdust cubicles twice a day".





**Farmer  
Focus** (Continued)

## Spring Grassland Management

Shaun's spring rotation plan - "I have to get approximately 2 hectares per week grazed at the start of the first rotation. The first third of the farm will be grazed as quickly as possible before targeting heavier covers in March."

| Week                  | Target HA Grazed/Day | Target HA Grazed By Weekend | Actual HA Grazed By Weekend | Target % | Actual % |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|----------|
| 03/02/2021-09/02/2021 | 0.29                 | 2.05                        |                             | 5        |          |
| 10/02/2021-16/02/2021 | 0.32                 | 4.29                        |                             | 10       |          |
| 17/02/2021-23/02/2021 | 0.35                 | 6.76                        |                             | 16       |          |
| 24/02/2021-02/03/2021 | 0.39                 | 9.52                        |                             | 23       |          |
| 03/03/2021-09/03/2021 | 0.45                 | 12.65                       |                             | 30       |          |
| 10/03/2021-16/03/2021 | 0.51                 | 16.25                       |                             | 39       |          |
| 17/03/2021-23/03/2021 | 0.61                 | 20.50                       |                             | 49       |          |
| 24/03/2021-30/03/2021 | 0.74                 | 25.68                       |                             | 62       |          |
| 31/03/2021-06/04/2021 | 0.95                 | 32.31                       |                             | 78       |          |
| 07/04/2021-13/04/2021 | 1.32                 | 41.50                       |                             | 100      |          |



## 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.

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