Joint Development Programme

Spring Grassland Management

Spring Management Series 2021

Edition 3

Tipping the grass grazed scales

With favourable grazing conditions in early March, many farms are now either on target or within touching distance of targeted percentage grazed within their Spring Rotation Planner (SRP). With more unsettled weather in the previous week, all efforts must be made to sustain a level grass in the diet, to achieve 66% of the platform grazed by March 20th (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils). With excellent regrowths on paddocks grazed in early February, attention now turns to the grazing of silage fields, and planning the application of organic and chemical fertilisers, to ensure a supply of high quality winter feed.

Grazed 12th February

Cleaning up for quality in 2021

With some farms failing to reach the target of 33% grazed by the end of February (or 7-10 days later on heavier soils), corrective action is required to increase the % area grazed, while still ensuring high levels of grass utilisation. In order to reach your farm's next target on its SRP 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. Ensure cows graze twice daily, therefore a reduction in the silage fed can be afforded, to increase grass intakes.
- Target lighter covers of 900-1100Kg DM/Ha, with intakes increasing every week post calving, more area can be grazed while meeting residual targets.

Grazing Success

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.

Surpassing Expectations

While some farms are falling short of their SRP targets others have surpassed them, and 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 (5-10 days). It ensures grass supply in early-mid April.

It is 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 breeding season.

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 conditions; e.g. 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.

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 outside blocks grazed off by 25th March.

Step 2: Get organic fertiliser (cattle slurry) spread via dribble bar or trailing shoe on the silage ground at a rate of 3,000gallons/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.

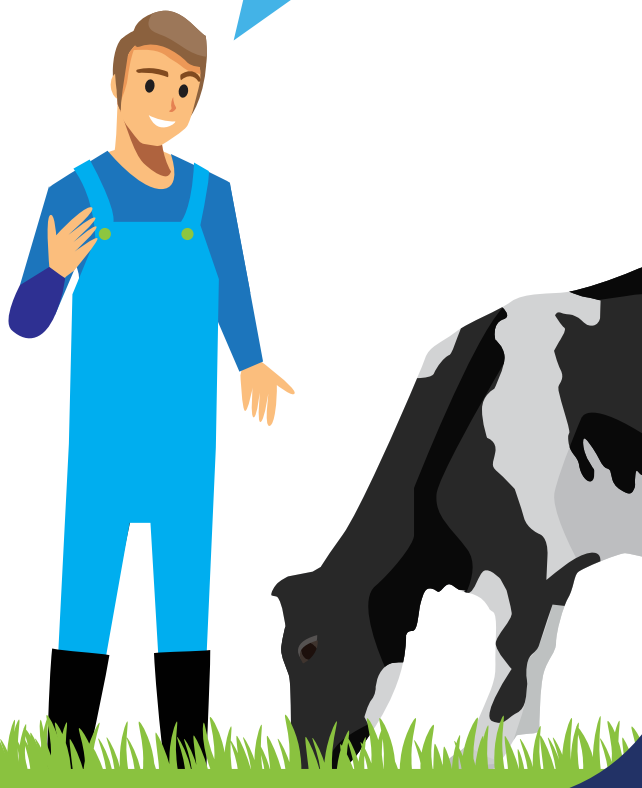
Top Tip:

With every 10 cows grazing, 7ac are required to graze these cows throughout the summer grazing season.

Example: 80 Cow herd

80 X .7ac = 56ac

Required to graze this herd throughout the summer grazing season. The remainder can be grazed now and closed up for 1st cut silage.



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.

1st Cut Grass Silage N,P & K Requirements (5t/ha DM) and Suggested Fertiliser Programmes					
Soil Index	**N kg/ha (units/ac)**	**P kg/ha (units/ac)**	**K kg/ha (units/ac)**	**Suggested Fertiliser Options[3,4]**	
				No Slurry[1] (bags/ac)	**+ Cattle Slurry[5] 3,000gal/ac**
1[1]	125 (100)	40 (32)	175 (140)	3.5 bags/ac 13-6-20 1.4 bags/ac ProUrea	1.9 bags/ac ProUrea + S
2[1]	125 (100)	30 (24)	155 (120)	3.5 bags/ac 13-6-20 1.4 bags/ac ProUrea	1.9 bags/ac ProUrea + S
3	125 (100)	20 (16)	125 (100)	3.0 bags/ac 13-6-20 1.6 bags/ac ProUrea	1.9 bags/ac ProUrea + S
4[2]	125 (100)	0	0	2.5 bags/ac ProUrea	2.5 bags/ac ProUrea

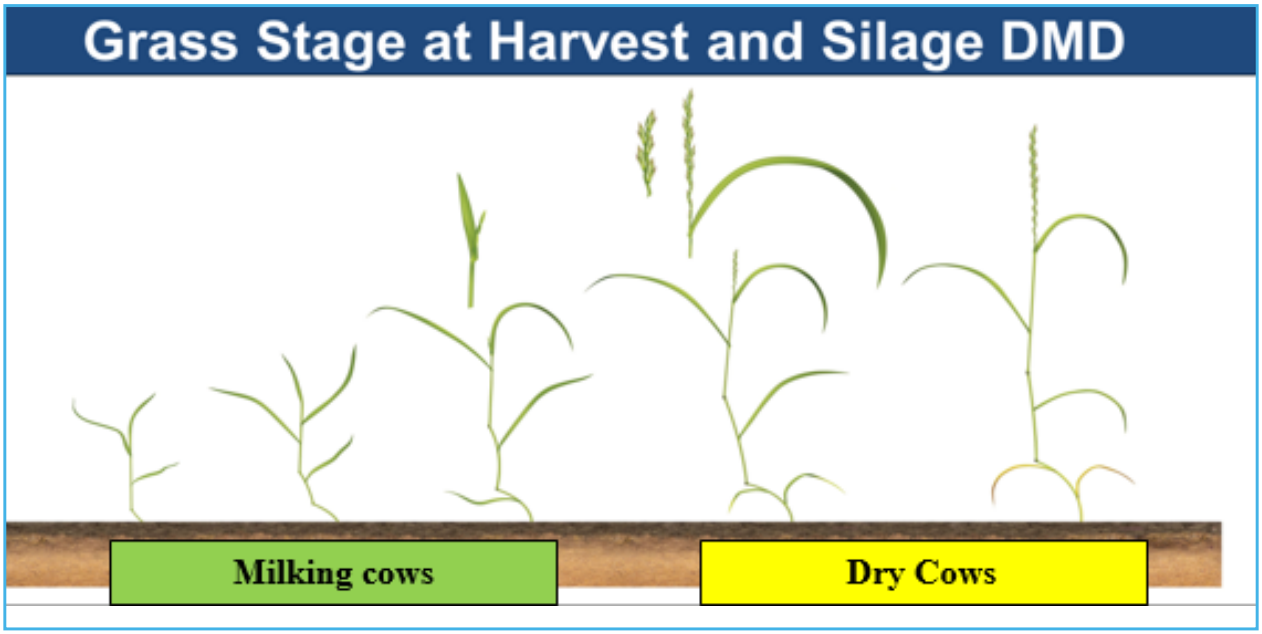
Step 4: Cutting date; by following these steps, the planned cutting date for this silage crop should be the 20th of May. Silage should be cut and wilted for no longer then 12-24hrs, which will result in 75% DMD silage weather permitting.

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

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

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.



Farmer Focus

Shaun Maguire
Tuberlion, Ballyconnell, Co.Cavan

Farm Profile

Farm Size: 80 Ha

Cow Nos.: 128 spring calving cows

Herd Performance: 527KgMS, of 900kgs concentrate

Platform Ha: 41.5

Platform stocking rate: 3.1Lu/Ha

% Herd Calved: 75%

Spring Rotation Planner

With 75% of the herd calved in just six weeks, herd performance has increased to 2.3Kg MS/cow/day. *"With the ideal weather conditions in early March, the cows were switched to grazing the wetter areas of the farm which had lighter covers of 800-1000Kg DM/Ha".*

"While getting these wetter areas of the farm cleaned off in the drier conditions was fantastic, it has meant we have exceeded the percentage area grazed targets".

With only the drier areas of the farm left to graze, Shaun plans to graze this ground by day during poor grazing conditions and will reintroduce silage to the cow's diets by night. This will continue until % grazed and SRP targets align. Shaun has recorded a farm cover of 840Kg DM/Ha on 6th March, which is 60Kg DM/Ha below targeted in the grass budget.

"I plan to introduce silage to the cows in mid-March during the poorer grazing conditions forecasted. This will increase my regrowths on paddocks grazed in this period, by limiting poaching, and not grazing when conditions deteriorate, until the feed budget balances again".

Week	Target HA Grazed/Day	Target HA Grazed By Weekend	Actual HA Grazed By Weekend	Target %	Actual %
03/02/2021-09/02/2021	0.34	2.40		6	
10/02/2021-16/02/2021	0.38	5.05	1.58	12	**3**
17/02/2021-23/02/2021	0.42	8.00	4.51	19	**10**
24/02/2021-02/03/2021	0.48	11.33	8.61	27	**20**
03/03/2021-09/03/2021	0.55	15.17	18.88	37	**45**
10/03/2021-16/03/2021	0.64	19.67		47	
17/03/2021-23/03/2021	0.78	25.12		61	
24/03/2021-30/03/2021	0.99	32.04		77	
31/03/2021-06/04/2021	1.35	41.50		100	

Farmer Focus (Continued)

Demanding Silage Excellence

"75% DMD high protein silage is the target with the first cut, to ensure this my planned cutting date is week-starting 17th May, weather permitting. I grazed off intended silage areas on the milk platform in early to March, and all intended silage ground on out blocks was grazed off at the end of the 2020 grazing season before housing weanling and in calf heifers".

"All silage ground has received 3,000 gallons of slurry via dribble bar in mid-March, and will receive 1.5 bags of protected urea in early April".

Between organic and chemical fertiliser applications the silage crop will be fertilised with the necessary P&K nutrients, and 96 units of Nitrogen.

Lakeland Dairies

Teagasc

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.

- Colin Anderson 087 7467424
- Owen McPartland 087 3302254
- Adrian McKeague 087 4138584