

## Take a closer look at your Enterprise

### Beef

- Research work has shown that animals turned out early to grass in early spring have 6% (+23kg) higher carcass weight than animals turned out later in spring.
- This could equate to close to €60 to €70/head. Turnout of animals should take place during periods of dry weather.
- With good underfoot conditions, this will give animals an opportunity to settle and start grazing properly.
- Early turnout will reduce the accumulation of surpluses during the main grazing season.

### Dairy

To capitalise on the benefits of grazed grass, dairy cows should be turned out to grass directly after calving, ground conditions permitting. The main objectives of spring grazing management are;

1. To increase the proportion of grazed grass in the diet of the dairy cow
  2. To condition swards for subsequent grazing rotations.
- Each extra day at grass in spring is worth €2.70/cow/day. This comes from reduced feed costs and labour input (slurry spreading etc) and an increase in milk protein concentration.
  - Dairy cows should be turned out directly post-calving. Cows should start grazing lower covers first to get them used to a grass diet again. After a week or 10 days, they can start grazing heavier covers.
  - Covers over 1,600kg DM/ha (greater than 4cm) should be grazed by early March at the very latest.
  - Farm cover at turnout should be approximately 800-900kg DM/ha, depending on mean calving date – an earlier calving date equates to higher animal demand and the need for a higher opening cover.
  - Aim to offer 1.0–1.2 tonne grass DM/cow from turnout until the end of the first rotation – this is achievable on farms where animals are turned out early.

## Sheep

The aim is to have enough grass to match ewes' demand until supply increases and matches demand (magic day). For an early/mid-March lambing flock, an opening farm cover of 600kg to 700kg grass DM/ha or 20 to 25 days ahead is recommended.

### Why?

- 10 ewes/ha with average demand of 2.5 kg DM /head/day in early lactation.
- $10 \times 2.5 =$  daily requirement of 25kg DM/day
- $650 \div 25 =$  26 days ahead.
- If we estimate average grass growth rate of 15kg DM/ha/day in early/mid-March, this will add another 10 to 15 days, so we have 35 to 40 days, which should extend to mid-April (magic day).

### Issues

- Insufficient area closed in autumn to build covers for spring.
- No N applied to boost covers and enhance March growth rates.

## Feeding the dairy cow in spring

- Cows reach peak lactation six to eight weeks after calving.
- Peak dry matter intake (DMI) occurs 10 to 12 weeks after calving.
- Cows use their fat reserves to make up the energy deficit in early lactation (milks off her back)
- Cows calving into a grass based system have a total DMI of 8kg to 11kg DM/cow/day during the first week after calving. This increases by between 0.75kg and 1kg DM/cow/day up to peak intake, which is 16kg to 18kg DM. See Figure 1.
- Grazed grass and concentrate can be the sole feeds with such a system. This allows grass silage to be completely removed from the diet post-calving.
- Care should be taken to ensure that cows do not lose more than half a unit of BCS as cow fertility will suffer if this occurs.
- Winter milk herds can reduce the rate of concentrate supplementation by 1kg to 2kg DM when grass is included in the diet.

## Supplementing the dairy cow at grass

- Quantity of grass available will dictate how much supplementation is offered to the cows.
- It is essential that as well as following the spring rotation planner, the farm is walked weekly and a cover completed so that decisions on grass availability and supplementation level, if required, can be made.
- $\text{Supplementation required} = \text{cows energy requirement} - \text{grass energy intake}$ .
- In general, the maximum level of supplementation for freshly calved cows in spring should be 6kg DM. If the deficit is greater than this, high-quality grass silage should be offered in combination with concentrate.
- As a general rule, six to eight weeks after calving, 15kg DM of grass plus 3kg DM of concentrate is sufficient for peak milk solids yield of 1.8kg to 2kg/cow/day, concentrate level can be reduced depending on grass supply.
- The protein content of early spring grass is high (greater than 20%), high protein concentrates are not required when the majority of the diet is made up of grazed grass.
- If supplementing to reduce the risk of grass tetany, make sure to check the concentrate composition so that the correct rate is being fed to offer protection. Cows require 30g of magnesium or 60g of calcined magnesite per day. Magnesium can also be supplied through pasture dusting or through treated water.

Dry matter intake of cows in early lactation

