

Management Notes



Christopher Breen

Dairying

Fertiliser application in July

Produce extra grass this grazing season by applying fertiliser after each grazing round. Only apply if there was rain within the current grazing rotation and the prills from the last sowing are gone. Research at AFBI shows protected urea or Calcium Ammonium Nitrate (CAN) is the most effective source of fertiliser nitrogen (N) during the summer months. The level of N is a farm decision and should be based on current growth rate; less than 25 kg dry matter (DM) per hectare growth, hold spreading until rain, 25-50 kg DM per hectare, spread at a reduced level (15 kg N per hectare), 50+ kg DM per hectare, spread as normal.

Calculate your forage requirements for the winter ahead now!

If you don't have enough first and second cut silage in your silos to meet requirements there is still time to plan for a larger third cut or make alternative arrangements. Tables 1 and 2 allow you to estimate stocks and demand on your own farm. Convert the volume of silage in your pits to tonnes by using the relevant conversion factor in

Table 1. Then calculate the silage required this winter based on the number of stock in each class and the number of months you normally feed silage.

Table 1: Conversion factors to convert silage volume to tonnes of silage

Silage DM %	Tonnes of silage per cubic metre
20	Multiply cubic metres by 0.77
25	Multiply cubic metres by 0.68
30	Multiply cubic metres by 0.60

Table 2: Estimated monthly feed requirement of stock (25% dry matter silage)

Livestock	Silage (tonnes per month)
Dairy cow in milk	1.4
Dry cow	0.9
0-1 year heifer	0.6
1-2 year heifer	0.9

If you haven't enough silage in stock, you can estimate how much land you need to close off by planning a third cut. A third cut will produce 10 tonnes of silage per hectare after seven weeks growth.

Wholecrop cereals are a good option for filling a fodder gap. Cereal crops, especially spring sown, have suffered in terms of both yield and quality this year and in general will be of similar quality to second cut grass silage. It is important to negotiate a price per tonne to take account of the quality and to be fair to both buyer and seller.



Have you enough silage to meet requirements?

Pre-reseed drainage repair

Fields planned for reseeded may benefit from improvements to drainage or soil aeration. Over time sheughs may have become blocked with silt/grass. It is important that these are cleaned out. Also check outflows from existing shores to ensure that they are still running.

Soil compaction

Compacted soil has been squashed into a solid layer restricting root growth and reducing grass response to nitrogen. Digging test holes at least 40 cm (16") deep with a spade allows you to see the extent of the problem and the depth of any compacted layer. Visible signs of compacted soils include a structure that is hard to break up, shallow roots growing horizontally, few worms



The depth of the compacted soil layer determines the type of machine to use

present, a bad smell and grey colour/brown mottling. The depth of the compacted layer determines the type of machine that should be used to rectify the problem. Machines available range from soil aerators to subsoilers. Soils that are very dry should be left to later in the year as subsoiling can further reduce soil moisture.

July jobs checklist

- Top grazing swards containing old dead grass or seed heads to maintain sward quality. Do not top if affected by drought.
- Calibrate parlour and out of parlour feeders to ensure accurate feeding.
- Where necessary, burn off swards to allow for reseeding during August.
- Assess heifer performance. Are they performing to meet targets?
- Check wholecrops and harvest when the grain is like a 'soft cheddar' (approximately 40% dry matter).

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competition from the existing sward. For this reason, direct drilling straight after silage harvest or after the sward is tightly grazed will maximise success rate. Ploughing, where possible, will act as a remedy for compaction and should also help with drainage.

Managing spring reseeded

Continue to monitor new spring reseeded and ideally graze down tight to promote tillering. This will also help clover to establish, if sown. Where a post-emergence spray has not been applied, weeds will tend to go to seed at this time of year. If this is the case, mow off this material and apply spray to the regrowth. It is important to kill these weeds now before their root systems have a chance to fully develop.

Monitoring livestock performance

It is impossible to accurately estimate cattle and lamb performance without regular weighing. Individual under performance can indicate health issues or inadequate milk yield of dams. Group under performance can be due to poor grass quality or a particular breeding line of stock. Where issues are identified, put a plan in place to improve performance. Live weight gains of 0.9 and 1.0 kg per day for yearling heifers and steers respectively are achievable on good quality grazed grass alone. Pre-weaning targets for heifer and bull weanlings of 1.1 and 1.3 kg per day can be achieved where grass quality and milk yields of dams are good.

An electronic identification (EID) system is worthwhile where flock size justifies the investment. Lambs can be EID tagged after birth and linked to their dam and sire. Weight and daily live weight gain information can then be recorded on the system in addition to other data such as birth date, birth type (for example single or twin) and veterinary treatments. This is a useful tool for identifying how well particular ewes or rams are breeding and will help in choosing replacement ewe lambs from the most productive ewes.

Live weight gain can be monitored from birth and between dates. Target an average daily live weight gain of 280-300 g per day for March born twin lambs pre-weaning on quality grazed grass alone. The target average live weight gain from weaning to slaughter for these lambs will reduce to 190-200 g per day where concentrates are not fed. Growth rate will be lower than this for later born lambs grazing towards the end of the season, when weather and grass quality are more variable. Supplementation of concentrates may be a viable option on some farms by that stage when grass supplies may need to be directed towards the ewe flock.

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Martin Reel

Finance

Farm business management checklist

Managing a farm business requires decisions to be made in both the medium and long term. Volatility arising from events outside the control of the business, such as poor weather, TB outbreaks and market disruptions caused by the Covid 19 pandemic can all impact on the financial wellbeing of farms. When to make savings in the business, it is important not to put the core business at risk.

Know your costs

As cash flow remains tight on farms due to lower prices, knowing your costs is crucial. Do you know your cost of production per litre? If not, add up all the costs listed in your year end accounts and divide the total by the number of litres produced. This will give an estimate of your cash production cost per litre. Similarly, for a beef/sheep enterprise, do you know how much profit was made for every kilogramme of carcass sold?

Review expenditure

It makes sense to analyse all expenditure to ensure it is both absolutely necessary and good value for money. A good starting point is to look at your farm bank statements. Take a fresh look at each direct debit. Are you paying for a service you don't use? If the answer is yes, then consider cancelling, but check first in case there is a notice period required and/or cancellation fee. If you do make use of the service make sure it is a net benefit to your business by either adding value or saving you more than it costs.

If you're not the book-keeper in the family, take some time to review invoices to keep up to date with current input costs. Are you getting value for money? Have you priced around? Could you reduce quantities purchased? On dairy farms, for example, CAFRE benchmarking figures show that concentrate per cow represents approximately 40% of the total cost of milk production. Similarly, the most efficient



suckler beef farms feed 42% less concentrates than the bottom 25%. A focus on improved feeding efficiency will reduce costs more than focusing on any other input.

Fertility and veterinary costs

Herd health plans should be maintained with vaccination programmes continued, along with regular foot trimming and pregnancy scanning. Short term savings achieved by cutting back on essential costs can have long term negative impacts due to reduced milk yields, lameness, more involuntary culling and increased vet bills.

Farm insurance

Not having valid public and employer's liability or machinery insurance could have serious implications for a business if a mishap occurs and a claim against the business is made.

Young stock

Do you have surplus heifers each year? Keeping more stock than required ties up money and time. Selling surplus stock will bring cash into the business. Calving heifers at

the target age of 23-24 months reduces the number of young stock carried on the farm and therefore the amount of feed and other inputs required. Significant savings can be made if the age of first calving is reduced from 30 to 24 months.

Machinery

Do you have all the machinery in the yard but pay a contractor to carry out the work? If the machinery is already there, it may be more economical to pay a tractor driver, rather than a contractor using his own equipment. Alternatively, is it more economical in the longer term to employ a contractor and not have the running costs associated with maintaining machinery? Benchmarking data shows that machinery costs are the largest component of fixed costs for all farm enterprises.

Finance

Finally, consider postponing major expenditure until prices improve. High interest charges and finance costs just add to the strain in difficult times. Know your overdraft situation and talk to your bank manager early if you are likely to exceed your limit. The earlier financial issues are discussed, the more options there are to help resolve them.

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Nigel Gould

Beef and Sheep

Autumn reseeded

If planning to reseed this year aim to have it completed by mid-August. This ensures the best chance of success and may allow at least one grazing pre-winter. It will also hopefully allow a post-emergence spray for weed control five to six weeks post-sowing.

Targeting weeds at this early stage before significant root development occurs increases the rate of success.

To achieve a good reseed it is important soil pH, phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are at optimum levels. Target a pH of 6.3, P index of 2+ and K index of 2-. Ensure appropriate levels of P and K are applied. For example, for

a soil with P and K indices of 2+ and 2- the recommended application levels of P and K are 50 and 60 kg per hectare, respectively. An appropriate fertiliser and liming strategy for the established sward is vital in sustaining the sward and minimising the re-occurrence of weeds and less productive grass species.

Decide on a cultivation technique that best suits the type of land. Conventional ploughing is often the best however, where soil is shallow and stoney a min-till approach is more appropriate. The more common form of min-till involves disking (two to three passes in alternate directions) and/or harrowing, followed by sowing the seed. It is important to graze or mow/top tightly to minimise the amount of trash in the sward. Direct drilling into an existing sward is also an option. This usually involves the seed being dropped into a shallow channel created by a disc. The aim when direct drilling is to minimise

competition from the existing sward. For this reason, direct drilling straight after silage harvest or after the sward is tightly grazed will maximise success rate. Ploughing, where possible, will act as a remedy for compaction and should also help with drainage.

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Jayne Mooney

Environment



Ermine moth caterpillar

Walk the patches first to check for waders and leave the sparser rush tussocks which provide cover for later in the season.

Leave field margins alone to help our wildlife

At this time of year the flowers and grasses present in the hedgerow base and field margin are of great value to wildlife and are often essential to keep pollinators going. The tendency can be to 'tidy-up' around the field. However, a field margin dominated by tussocky grasses and other plants can provide essential food, cover or nesting sites for invertebrates such as bees, spiders, beetles, flies and caterpillars allowing them to build up numbers at this time. These invertebrates are also important food for many birds and their young in the nest.

Encourage tussocky grass rich growth to develop at the base of the hedgerow, so there is at least 1.0 metre of such growth on each side, preferably with wildflowers present. The wider the margins the better. This can be

achieved by taking care when spreading fertilisers, slurry and plant protection products and not allowing them to reach the hedge base or preferably the few metres next to the hedge. When topping grass, stay out from the hedge. If using a temporary electric fence along hedges or sheughs, keep it out a few metres to allow the margin to develop.

Don't cut brambles and young nettles until the autumn. Bramble flowers are very useful to bees at this time of year and of course the resulting fruit is a bird food source. Whilst nettles are a sign of excess nutrients in the hedge base they are valuable food plants for caterpillars of peacock, red admiral, small tortoiseshell and comma butterflies, so try to leave some nettles. With the June profusion of cow parsley now over, clover, vetch, and bramble flowers remaining in the hedge margin are especially valuable in July.

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