

Management Notes



Christopher Breen

Dairying

Spring turnout

Be prepared for turnout this spring. Grazed grass is still a relatively cheap feed for milking cows. However, for a dairy farm to capitalise on grass this spring you need to plan and budget ahead. Soil fertility is key for early spring growth. Low fertility soil (P index 1 or below) equates to a loss in grass growth over 12 months of more than 2.0 tonne dry matter per hectare. Soil testing and fertiliser planning are key requirements for improving grass production, especially in early spring.

At turnout, graze cows on a grass cover of 2500 kg dry matter per hectare (the ankle of your boot). Grass should be grazed down to 1500 kg dry matter per hectare (the heel of your boot).

To capitalise on early spring growth:

- Walk your farm to increase awareness of ground conditions and help identify where the grass is on the grazing block.

- Select cows yielding less than 30-32 litres per day. In autumn calving herds cows calved in September/October/November should be back in calf and eligible for turnout this spring.
- Graze cows, even for a few hours per day. This can yield benefits in terms of lower feed cost, helping to increase financial margins for the business. Grazing cows early in the season also develops a grazing wedge or structure to the grazing block. This improves subsequent grass quality through the grazing season.
- Minimise ground damage when grazing. Use simple techniques to minimise soil damage, for example put cows out with an appetite, use back fencing, have multiple access points into paddocks, select dry paddocks and only graze for a few hours per day.

Aim to complete your first grazing cycle by the third week in April as this will prevent grass covers getting too heavy. A surge in



Don't hesitate about getting cows out

growth could mean that by the time you reach the end of the first grazing cycle, covers are too heavy for cows to graze out cleanly, making it more difficult to maintain grass quality throughout the grazing season.

In most cases, March grass has a higher energy value than the silage cows were fed. Full March grazing has the potential to produce over 15 litres of milk. Getting cows to grass in March and good management allows you to increase your milk from forage. Practically this requires you to increase the M+ in the parlour computer feed settings by 3.0 to 4.0 kg of milk at turnout. The few hours

grazing after morning milking will save about 1.5 kg of concentrates per cow daily, replacing over half a tonne of concentrate a week for 50 cows. Continue to adjust the M+ in the parlour computer feed settings as cows move to full time grazing. In addition to the immediate savings in concentrate costs there should be improvements in milk protein and yield.

The message is clear. Get some cows out grazing as soon as conditions allow. Adjust the M+ in the parlour computer feed settings at turnout and as cows move to full time grazing. Have your grazing rotation fully established by the third week in April.

March jobs checklist

- If spreading slurry on silage ground, make sure it is spread by late March if using low emission slurry spreading equipment. Aim for mid March at the latest if using a spread-plate. Do not spread slurry on waterlogged ground, when raining heavily or when heavy rain is forecast within the next 48 hours, where the ground has a slope of 20% or more, is frozen or covered in snow.
- Consider fertiliser needs based on soil analysis results, crop requirement and slurry/manure applications.
- Complete any maintenance on cow tracks and paddock fencing in preparation for the grazing season.
- Change time clocks at the end of the month when the hour changes.



Leigh McClean

Crops

CEREALS

Winter cereals

A wet autumn in which winter cereals were sown over an extended period has resulted in crops which now range from strong and well developed to thin and backward. High winter rainfall has left soil nitrogen (N) levels low, therefore early N is a priority to kick start them back into life.

Winter barley requires at least one third of its total N during late tillering, before mid March and winter wheat the same proportion before the end of March. For thin and struggling crops, sow N earlier to encourage tillering. If ground conditions aren't suitable, increase application rates at first dressing once field conditions allow. Include at least 20-30 kg per hectare sulphur in your early fertiliser dressings and top up remaining phosphate and potash.

Where herbicide was not applied in the autumn, prioritise winter barley, as the few

grass weed herbicides effective for this crop will only work on small grass weeds. Generally, latest application dates are earlier than for winter wheat. Consult product labels for the latest application date or growth stage.

Spring cropping

The removal of greening requirements means there is no longer crop diversification or EFA requirements. This simplifies cropping decisions.

There is still time to soil sample fields before spreading slurry or farmyard manure. The Nutrients Action Programme requires a fertilisation plan for farms using chemical phosphorus fertiliser, phosphorus rich manure and anaerobic digestate. A recent soil analysis (within the last four years) is required to demonstrate crop need for phosphorus fertiliser. The CAFRE Crop Nutrient Calculator fulfils the fertilisation plan requirement and can be accessed via DAERA Online Services.

Excessively wet conditions last harvest has reduced germination in some crops intended for seed. A seed germination test is money well spent in confirming the purity and viability of the seed and the starting point for seed rate calculations. Seed testing is carried out at the Official Seed Testing Station at AFBI, Crossnacreevy.

Sowing should take place as soon as a good seedbed can be created. Aim for a seed rate between 350 and 400 grains per square metre. The lower rate should suffice for March sown barley drilled into a good seedbed. Increase the seed rate in poorer conditions such as cold, wet or heavy soils or if sowing later.

Protein Crops Scheme

The Northern Ireland Protein Crops Payment Pilot Scheme is being introduced for the 2021 and 2022 Scheme years. Eligible crops will be combinable beans, peas and sweet lupins. The minimum area claimed must be at least 0.3 hectare and applicants may only



Aim to sow 350 seeds per square metre in good conditions

claim on land planted in protein crops. Areas of protein crops sown in a mixture with cereals or other crops are not eligible for the Scheme. Protein crops declared under the Scheme must not be harvested until after 31st July 2021.

POTATOES

Seed preparation for planting

Check seed as it arrives on farm and have a sample hot boxed to determine the presence of disease and overall sprouting vigour. Pre-sprouting, including tray and bag systems, must ensure adequate temperature control and ventilation (to control sprout growth and protect against frost) and light (to control sprout growth). Set up seed of early potato varieties in sprouting boxes with the aim of producing one strong sprout per seed tuber, one stem and a small number of large tubers early. The opposite holds for maincrop potatoes where multiple sprouting is encouraged to produce many tubers which can increase in size over a longer growing season.

Mini-chitting

This system of seed preparation aims to produce seed tubers with sprouts no more than 2 mm long. Seed is stored at 3-4 °C until close to planting time. Refrigeration is then turned off for seven to ten days to allow chitting to occur. Once sprouts of 1-2 mm have formed evenly, seed is cooled down again to 3-4 °C to prevent further sprout growth before planting. The main benefit of mini-chitting is a crop that emerges quickly and evenly.



Nigel Gould

Beef and Sheep

BEEF

Turnout of cattle

Be prepared for turning out cattle this spring. In reality, preparations should have started last autumn with the timely closure of grazing areas. In the lead up to turnout, gradually reduce concentrates for weanlings and store cattle. This will lessen the dependence on concentrates and ease the transition to grazed grass.

To maximise compensatory growth, avoid having cattle over conditioned at turnout. For spring born weanlings in their first winter target live weight gain is generally 0.6-0.7 kg per day. Subsequent target live weight gain at

grass is approximately 1.0 kg per day. Turnout lighter, priority stock first. Ideally turn cattle out in the morning, especially calves and if night time temperatures dip considerably. Although it will depend on grass covers - it is preferable to start with sheltered areas. On farms with heavier soils in particular, day time grazing may be an option. On farms where grazing areas are near or surround the farmyard, autumn born weanlings can be creep grazed. This reduces the cow-calf bond, with the intention of weaning before cows are turned out.

Dry autumn cows can be used to graze rough pasture or clean up paddocks after young stock. Higher producing animals, such as lactating spring calved cows may be at risk from grass tetany. Lush rapidly growing grass, accompanied by periods of wet or inclement weather increases the risk of tetany. Magnesium lick buckets are the most common method of prevention.



SHEEP

Turning out ewes and lambs

Turn out ewes and lambs to sheltered areas as soon as weather allows and monitor lambs closely. Where quality grass is available and conditions are good, supplementation with concentrates may not be required. However, for ewes rearing triplets or year old hoggets rearing twins, supplementation for the first four to six weeks will improve performance.

Recent research on anthelmintic resistance suggests that there is no need to treat healthy, fit ewes for worms. Use faecal sampling to identify if there is a need to treat. Hogget ewes lambing at one year old may not have built up adequate resistance to worms yet, partly due to the demands of pregnancy. These ewes are likely to require a worm treatment. In all cases, consult your vet about the best worm control strategy for your flock. Treat all ewes for fluke. As anthelmintic resistance is an increasing threat you should take a responsible approach to treatment and reduce the risk of resistant strains of fluke and worms developing on farm.

Lambing records

Lambing is a busy time with labour usually at a premium. However, taking time to record as much information as possible at lambing can help make informed decisions about which ewes to cull later and which ewe lambs offer the most potential as replacements. Ewes can be identified for culling based on poor mothering ability or persistent health problems such as prolapse, lameness and mastitis. Tagging lambs at birth will allow selection of suitable ewe lambs as replacements. If the aim is to increase prolificacy, select lambs from twin or triplet births. Year on year selection of vigorous ewe lambs from ewes showing good mothering ability, prolificacy, milk yield and no obvious negative traits will improve future maternal genetics in your flock. In the long term, this will reduce the time spent with problem ewes and lead to fewer losses and improved flock productivity. Select more lambs than required to allow for mortality and for further selection at a later date, based on individual lamb performance. Ewe lambs with good performance to eight weeks of age will generally be from ewes with superior milk yield. Although record keeping is not necessarily exclusive to Electronic Identification (EID) recording systems, EID will reduce labour especially where performance is regularly monitored. There are a range of EID options available to suit a range of budgets.



Pamela Gardiner

Information Technology

Single Application and Map Service and Entitlement Transfer Service now open

The 2021 Single Application and Map Service and Entitlement Transfer Service are now available within DAERA Online Services. It is advised to take note of important dates when planning to complete the Single Application or Transfer of Entitlements. A guide to key dates can be found on the DAERA website; <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/single-application-2021-key-dates>.

You or your agent can submit Single Applications and Entitlement Transfer Applications via DAERA's Online Service. The Entitlement Transfer Service will close on 4th May 2021. Single Applications must be submitted online by 17th May 2021 to avoid a late claim penalty.

The farm payments made by DAERA represent the single largest income for some farms in Northern Ireland (NI), and underpin

the financial viability of the agricultural industry. These payments represent DAERA's continued commitment to farming families and the rural economy right across NI, following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union.

To help farmers, the application process from 2021 onwards has been simplified with the amalgamation of greening payments into the Basic Payment Scheme and a change in entitlement values from euros to pounds sterling.

The Single Application is the method for claiming any of the following Schemes:

- Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).
- Young Farmers' Payment (YFP).
- Regional Reserve Entitlement allocation or top up (as a young farmer or few entrant).
- Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS).

- Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS).
- Farm Woodland Scheme (FWS).
- Forest Expansion Scheme (Annual premia).
- Small Woodland Grant Scheme (SWGS).
- Protein Crops Scheme.

You should also use the Single Application and Map Service to notify DAERA of any changes to your land.

Need help?

You should allow adequate time to check all the information is correct and to avoid unnecessary penalties. You should submit the application as soon as possible.

There are a number of options available if you require help to complete the 2021 Single Application:

- The Single Application and Map Service has built-in help and warning messages.
- Guidance documents and 'how to' videos are available on the DAERA website.
- During the application period, you can contact the Single Application Advisory Service on 0300 200 7848 or email areabasedschemes@daera-ni.gov.uk. Our advisors will be ready to help Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm.
- Alternatively, you can use the services of an agent or trusted person, who can get online access to complete the application

on your behalf. You will need to complete a form to nominate this person if you have not previously done so. The form can be downloaded from the DAERA website; <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/appointing-agent-act-your-behalf-authorized-persons-2021> or an agent may provide this.

- You can also opt in to receive emails and SMS text messages to keep up to date with scheme news and reminders on key dates. To do so, update your preferences on the 'Personal Details' page of your DAERA Online Services account.

Government Gateway – two factor authentication for HMRC customers

HMRC have changed the way customers sign into their services by introducing two factor authentication. How does this change affect DAERA Online Service users?

If you use the same Government Gateway ID for HMRC and DAERA Online Services, you will now receive a six digit access code each time you sign in to DAERA Online Services. If this is the case, you need to ensure the details you use to receive this six digit access code are up to date. You can check your details by signing into your HMRC account, reviewing your security options and setting up a backup option as an alternative way to receive access codes, if required. If you use a different Government Gateway ID for HMRC and DAERA Online Services you will be unaffected by this change.