

Management Hints

Messages:

- ▶ As a family define what your future will look like.
- ▶ Most management decisions in June revolve around grass and breeding (this being by far the most important!)
- ▶ Grass covers drives quality grass and easy grassland management.
- ▶ Round bail instead of topping.
- ▶ Quality and quantity of grass is driven by nitrogen and sulphur.
- ▶ Empty all tanks of slurry onto silage ground.
- ▶ Focus on grazing target to make enough 2nd cut silage.
- ▶ Missed heats are 25-40 per cent on farms due to poor heat detection of repeats.
- ▶ Check replacement weights against targets

DEFINE WHAT YOUR FUTURE WILL LOOK LIKE

- ▶ It is vital that farm families define what their future/s will look like and not spend too much time looking back at the past.
- ▶ This task should be divided up into: personal family plan and business model.
- ▶ Aspects of personal family plan to consider, in no particular order of importance, might be:
 - ▶ How many years, if ever, before father/owner steps aside from management?
 - ▶ Who is likely to then manage the farm? The big issue, as I see it, is that fathers give pseudo/no responsibility to sons, aged 25-35years, resulting in frustration and farm stagnating.
 - ▶ How can we manage that transition period? Roles must be defined.
 - ▶ Will two farm incomes be required during this transition, and can we quantify? In my opinion two families will need at least €80,000/year, at least. At €600/cow profit that means that there must be 133 cows on the farm.
 - ▶ Is there a family rota of time off and holidays stitched in? It doesn't work thinking we never needed that "sort of thing"! How much income "do we need in semi-retirement"? It will be €35 -40,000. Have we planned for that?
 - ▶ Where will the retiring parents reside? "In our home, of course" is the usual reply, even if the dwelling is in the middle of the farmyard!
 - ▶ Are there other siblings "to be done for" by way of education, a deposit for a home, or whatever? Some siblings see it as unfair that one person getting a huge asset while they struggle, by living in a flat, to save for a deposit.
 - ▶ Farmers should be extremely careful when justifying land purchase "to make the home farm bigger" when this is done to the detriment of other siblings' life chances, particularly if the farm is large already.
- ▶ Aspects of the business plan to consider:
 - ▶ Do we need to get professional advice to guide us through this very important exercise?
 - ▶ Can we generate the personal incomes listed above that are required? If not, how?
 - ▶ Can we become more efficient so as to make more than €600/cow (or whatever it is) profit?
 - ▶ What would happen the farm if divorce occurred or son/daughter (new owners) died?
 - ▶ Will milk price, environmental issues, emissions, costs, Brexit, etc. impact on the farm being full-timed farmed?
 - ▶ Are we going to operate a high or low-cost system in the

future?

- ▶ Personal circumstances will dictate the questions to address, but each family must sit down and answer the questions. It would be best if each member answered them separately before a formal meeting and then seek agreement for the plan ahead.

BIG MANAGEMENT TASKS FOR JUNE

- ▶ Managing the breeding season end.
 - ▶ Are there too many repeats?
 - ▶ Am I organised with adequate numbers of fertile stock bulls?
- ▶ "Have I over 70 per cent of my winter silage in the pit by mid-June"?
- ▶ "Have I quality grass available to the cows during a period where it goes stemmy"? Less than 25 per cent of the paddock should have dung-pads.

GRASS COVER DRIVES DECISIONS!

- ▶ When grass is too strong and stemmy quality (DMD) is low and therefore, milk yield decreases too fast.
 - ▶ When grass is grazed at low pre-grazing covers (PGC) you grow less grass and eventually the rotation gets too short and one ends up in a "tail spin".
- ▶ Farmers who are measuring grass are not using the "wedge" with confidence to make decisions to manage the grass as just mentioned.
- ▶ The target amount of grass in the next paddock, PGC, and the amount of grass on the whole farm, average farm cover (AFC), will vary from farm to farm depending on each farms' stocking rate on the grazing area.
- ▶ If you want less topping or baling of "strong" paddocks and more profit, then you must get your PGC and AFC correct.
- ▶ The following are the targets (Kgs DM/ha) for various stocking rates on the grazing area:

Stocking Rate (Cows/ha)	Pre Grazing Cover (S.R. x 17 x 21+100)*	Average Farm Cover (S.R. x 180)**
2.0	815	360
2.5	990	450
3.0	1170	540
3.5	1350	630
4.0	1530	720
4.5	1700	810

*Stocking rate x Daily Allowance x Rotation Length + Residual = Kg DM per hectare

**Stocking rate x recommended cover per cow (range 140-190) = Kg DM per hectare

- ▶ If you don't know what this is all about you must go and learn.
- ▶ A lot of cows milked 2 kgs milk solids/day (MS) in May and will now be achieving 1.7 to 1.95. A 560kg cow, milking this amount, will require almost 19kg DM/hd/day. Smaller cows less, 17 kgs, and bigger cows more.
- ▶ How to make decisions with the Wedge at a farmer stocked at 4cows/ha in June:
- ▶ When the PGC is near 1530 and the AFC of 720 and growth rates are near demand, continue as you are.
 - ▶ When PGC are above 1530 and AFC are greater than 720 and growth rates are looking good consider taking out 1-2 paddocks ASAP.
 - ▶ When AFC is a good bit lower than 720 and PGC's are tight with unpredictable growth rates action must be taken by way of:
 - ▶ The addition of extra grass from closed of silage/zero

grazed grass or high quality bales is a must – take this action if you have more than 70 per cent of your silage in the pit.

- ▶ If short of silage a few kgs meal would be the best option.
- ▶ In times of massive or poor growth grass measure twice per week.

BALES AS A GRASS MANAGEMENT TOOL

- ▶ As topping is effectively wasting grass or utilising less of the grass grown, we must avoid topping as an option at all costs. How?
- ▶ Many farmers are now using a disc-mower (instead of toppers) to manage their grazing to very high quality levels by cutting out ‘strong paddocks’ for baled silage.
- ▶ This material should be cut, very low at 3.5 cms, tedded or left in small rows for wilting, then bagged.
 - ▶ It will take 3-6 days longer to come back into the rotation, depending on cover.
- ▶ This silage will be very good quality:
 - ▶ It will be 80 per cent + DMD, nearly as good as meal and costing less than 10cents/kg DM,
 - ▶ It can and must replace meal in August-September-October-February,
 - ▶ Aim to have one bale of this material for every 4 cows in herd so as to reduce your Autumn-Spring meal bill.
- ▶ For every 4 bales taken off a paddock, you must put back out 1000 gallons of undiluted slurry immediately to replenish P & K.
- ▶ Topping becomes necessary on under stocked farms and farmers who are not into measuring grass. This year is a

particular problem due to the massive burst of growth in late April to early May which resulted in a stemmy base and more than 25 per cent dung-pads in paddocks.

- ▶ Most topping done by farmers is only cosmetic (waste of time).
- ▶ Having a lot of “tall grass” in a paddock is a terrible waste of Nitrogen (you applying it on 25-30 per cent of the paddock that will not be grazed) and Grass (because all the leaves left after this grazing will rot and be replaced over the next 21 days)
- ▶ Must top to 3,5cms (no more) over ground level.
- ▶ A rotary disc mower is the best – I don’t see any place on a farm for conventional toppers as grass management tools.
- ▶ Because topping reduces grass growth; one must only top every second or third paddock.
- ▶ If topping all paddocks the rotation length would want to be 25-27 days or the stocking rate very low.
- ▶ Topping must be done the day after grazing, otherwise regrowth’s are damaged,
- ▶ Low topping will not damage the grazed area or cut off any of it, unless very high.
- ▶ Avoid topping as much as possible as you are wasting grass – every 1 ton/ha is equal to €180/ha extra profit. If the situation and grass growth allows, you could decide not to top but plan to pre-cut or bale it on next rotation.

GRASS WON’T GROW WITHOUT N

- ▶ You cannot grow grass and maintain quality without Nitrogen.
- ▶ But you must work within your nitrate limits, as follows:

It's important to treat early with an ectoparasiticide such as Spotinor® to reduce the risk of lice infestations and to prevent milk and weight gain productivity losses.

Lice infestations can have a detrimental impact on the production and performance of housed cattle by causing:

- Irritation of the skin, leading to biting, scratching and rubbing
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Cows per hectare (June)	Units per acre
3.5 Or less	0-14 in late June
3.5 - 3.75	21 in late June
3.75-4.0	28 in late June
4.0 - 4.25	28 in early June
4.25 Or higher	28 in early June

- ▶ These are monthly recommended amounts.
- ▶ If you are on a 3-week rotation, you cannot put on this level of N after each grazing.
 - ▶ It will be too much, so divide up for use after each grazing.
 - ▶ I don't recommend once per week spreading because N has gone into leaf and is wasted before it works for max growth.
- ▶ One spreading over the whole farm on the same day, every 4-6 weeks, is what should be done.
 - ▶ The quantities are too small to split after each grazing; it is very laborious and ties up a man and tractor every day of the week.
- ▶ On sulphur deficient farms you will get a response of 10-50 per cent more grass by spreading 20 units per acre of

sulphur between now and August.

- ▶ Because sulphur interferes with copper don't use or over use it if you don't need it.
- ▶ Fields for aftergrass, after a silage cut, should get 30-40 units of Nitrogen with 2-3 units of S.
 - ▶ For every 1,000 gallons of slurry applied, allow 8 units of Nitrogen.
 - ▶ Use the slurry on these fields immediately after cutting, delaying nitrogen by 6-7 days

SLURRY CARE & USE

- ▶ If you don't spread all your slurry on to bare silage ground now, you won't have the chance to spread it all in 'one go' later in the year.
- ▶ Go about this very important chore in a planned way:
 - ▶ Agitate the tanks before cutting the silage.
 - ▶ Have warning signs up in and around sheds during agitation.
 - ▶ Have the contractor booked to spread as the silage is being picked up.
 - ▶ Have warning signs when going on to the public road and be able to clean the road if need arises.
- ▶ The spreading rate will be 1,500-2,500 gallons of diluted slurry per acre.
 - ▶ Very heavy applications result in run-off or caking on the surface.
 - ▶ This will save 12-20 units of Nitrogen per acre.
 - ▶ Do not spread within 30-40 yards of wells and open waterways.
 - ▶ Minimise risk of pollution.
 - ▶ Do not spread when wind is blowing towards local householders.
 - ▶ Use downward spreading splash plates or trailing shoe to minimise losses.
 - ▶ Turn off the vacuum tanker immediately when tanker is empty.
 - ▶ Again, be very careful, while agitating, as the gasses will kill without warning.
 - ▶ Too many road accidents happen as a result of no warning signs or muck on the road and/or involvement of very young tractor drivers.
 - ▶ Talk about this safety issue in advance to staff.
 - ▶ Spread the slurry immediately the silage is cut.
 - ▶ Nitrogen should be spread 5-7 days later.
 - ▶ You will lose N to the atmosphere if spread near the slurry spreading date.
 - ▶ Anyway, there is no rush in spreading bag N as there will be no growth for 7-10 days.

GRAZING TARGET FOR A 2ND CUT

- ▶ A 2nd cut of silage is almost certainly required on all reasonably stocked farms.
 - ▶ By stocking cows at 3.6cows/ha, calves at 14/ha and replacements at 2,200kgs weight per ha the remainder of the farm should be closed up for silage.

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- ▶ For second cut, use 70-80 units of N, 14 units P and 60 units K and 10 units S per acre; but make allowances for nutrients in slurry.
- ▶ Each 1,000 gallons has 5 units of N, 5 units P and 30 units K.
- ▶ Get the silage contractor to cut from the centre of the field out so as to allow wildlife and young pheasants to escape.
- ▶ Silage preservation and quality has disimproved during the last few years.
 - ▶ If silage needs an additive that preserves it, spend the money but if it doesn't you cannot afford to spend.
 - ▶ You need a preservative when sugars are low due to excess moisture (rain) or very lush high quality grass.
 - ▶ If you can cut in dry conditions, tedding and wilting also helps, and you definitely need no additive.
 - ▶ As the quality of our silage has slipped over the last few years, we must improve the quality by cutting earlier (a few days makes all the difference) and don't wait for bulk.
- ▶ You must get your silage contractor to cut low, definitely no higher than 3.5 cms off the ground.
 - ▶ Otherwise you will have poor quality aftergrass from these fields later.
- ▶ You must collect all silage effluent in your tank.
 - ▶ Don't take for granted that this is happening but ensure that it is.
 - ▶ Fish kills are high risk and the consequences are very serious for the offending farmer.

SOW KALE NOW

- ▶ You should consider it because one hectare will feed 27 weanlings next winter with 1-2 kgs DM of silage for 3 months.
- ▶ It will be one of the cheapest ways of winter feeding cows next winter
- ▶ Sow in early June to maximise yield,
- ▶ Because the seed is very small, a fine, firm seed bed is required
- ▶ Sow 4.5-5 kgs/ha of seed if drilled – more if broadcast,
- ▶ The ph must be 6.5 or greater,
- ▶ Fertiliser; Use 80 units/acre Nitrogen in two dressings; 24 units/acre Phosphate and 130 units/acre of Potash (4.3 bags 0:7:30 +N).
- ▶ To facilitate feeding silage with the kale and to avoid excessive tractor wheel damage during winter, put out baled silage every 30-50 metres on the headland.

MISSED HEATS ARE 25-40%?

- ▶ According to ICBF, "Prolonged repeat Intervals (% of repeat intervals greater than 24 days) are running at 25-40 per cent on many herds compared with 19 per cent for the Top 15 per

cent of dairy farmers.

- ▶ This either indicates embryo loss or missed heats,
- ▶ Each missed heat now results in €250 per cow loss:
 - ▶ She will be a late calver.
 - ▶ She may be culled if she doesn't go in calf before the end of breeding season leading to losses of €1000 to €2000 (potential lifetime loss).
- ▶ We are now in the most difficult part of the breeding season:
 - ▶ It is more difficult to identify bulling cows,
 - ▶ Bulling activity is now only one-fifth of what it was 4-5 weeks ago.
 - ▶ Fewer cows are bulling, therefore, less bulling activity and as some cows are only mounted 5-6 times (average 10) with each mount only lasting 2-3 seconds, the chances of not seeding these cows bulling now is very high.
- ▶ You must "up" your heat observation efforts:
 - ▶ Tail paint or such aids are now more important than ever and should be topped up every 3-4 days.
 - ▶ A vasectomised bull (one per 25 bulling animals) with a chin-ball should now be introduced, but it is only possible if you have one.
- ▶ If more than 25-30 per cent of cows are repeating then you have a problem. It may be due to:
 - ▶ Management errors; such as poor heat detection, animal pain/stress,
 - ▶ Seasonal factors; such as nutritional deficits.
 - ▶ Female factors; nutrition deficit/excess, infection/disease/viruses,
 - ▶ Male factors; such as AI bull (some have better conception rates), timing of AI (best time is 18hours after onset), poor AI-man, stock bull (7 per cent are totally infertile while 30 per cent may be sub-fertile)
- ▶ Scan cows now (28-35 days after service) to confirm pregnancy:
 - ▶ It will identify pregnancy and/or weak pregnancies,
 - ▶ It will help to identify problems, such as cysts,
 - ▶ You will have two or three more chances to get them in calf.
 - ▶ Think seriously about this advice!
- ▶ Bull late calvers at 30-40 days after calving with an easy calving, short calving interval AI bulls (minus 7-10 days). Most beef breeds don't compare well with AI Friesian or Jersey on this trait.
- ▶ Use your breeding chart to predict when cows are due to repeat.
 - ▶ This will help you not miss any expected repeats.

BEWARE OF STOCK BULL

- ▶ So says AHL. I say don't go there at all as they are too risky to get cows in calf late in season and they have an annual



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cost of €800-€1,200 each to get 30cows in calf. But some farmers lease bulls for four to six weeks at a cost of €300-€500. Take the following advice:

- ▶ Know your own herd status for all the common infectious diseases and how the leased or purchased bull compares (get in writing) –there are big health risks!
- ▶ Get a certificate stating the bull is fertile but don't take for granted that he remains such.
- ▶ Wait until late July before introducing the stock-bull, if at all.
- ▶ Use a short gestation bull, such as Aberdeen Angus, Hereford or Belgian Blue, but a Jersey (can be dangerous) would be best.
- ▶ Make sure he is fit (not lame or has back trouble), healthy (has got the same vaccines that the cows got), fertile (have your own on checked!), and well used to a grass environment.
- ▶ You will need a bull for every 20 - 25 cows expected to repeat.

BRIEF REMINDERS

- ▶ Target weights(kgs) on 1st June for replacements must drive your management:

	% Cow Weight	Holstein Fr	Jersey X
Bulling heifers	63%	367	342
Calves	23%	135	127

Any animal under these weights must be separated out and get priority grass or be fed 1-2kgs meal.

If you have animals out on contract check their weights NOW. No animal should be under target weight – if so the rearer must address same. At the other end of the scale no animal should be too much ahead of target (20+kgs) – they won't milk. Dose for worms and move to aftergrass, leaving them 2-3 days in same field before moving,

- ▶ The IBR annual vaccine may be due in June/July.
 - ▶ Change liners at 2,000 milkings;
- If you have eight rows being milked twice per day, then each liner does 16 milkings per day. Therefore, you will need to change liners after 125 days (2,000 divided by 16) or 4.25 months. Now.
- ▶ Continue to feed milk/meal to late/small calves; none to big calves.
 - ▶ There is no need to feed any meal to cows now.
 - ▶ Reduce your work load and hours per day worked; plan some time off.

“Before addressing the future, approach the subject with light not heat, rationale not emotion, and timing not tradition”



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FARM YARD DANGERS

With summer fast approaching, the farmyard can become an increasingly dangerous place. As the level of machinery activity intensifies, with silage and cereal harvesting, slurry and fertilizer spreading, the potential risks to children and elderly increases.

- It is recommend that all contractors are briefed, before work commences, on the layout of the farmyard and what children or elderly have access to the farmyard.
- Have a secure place for children to play
- Lock away all ladders
- Prevent children from climbing on gates or bales
- Make sure all slurry tanks and access points are secure after use
- Wear high vis clothing when machinery is being operated in the yard