

- ▶ Set out your objective for 2019 and make a plan to achieve.
- ▶ Make your cost saving plan for meal and fertiliser.
- ▶ Prices paid for land rental is “pure madness”
- ▶ Manage the Spring Rotation Planner to increase April grass yield.
- ▶ The plan to utilise 14 tons grass in 2019.
- ▶ Complete the first rotation early so as to achieve 10 grazing’s/paddock.
- ▶ Weigh maiden heifers now!
- ▶ Manage calving date for more profit on your farm?

OBJECTIVE FOR 2019

- ▶ To reduce meal feeding to 500kgs,
 - If not over-stocked and growing a lot of grass this target is easily achieved; therefore it is all about grass!
- ▶ To go as near as possible to achieving:
 1. Tons of grass utilised per hectare of 12-16 tons.
 2. 6 week calving rate of 90 per cent on the cows.
- ▶ By achieving these you will be profitable; but you must write down HOW am I going to improve them over the 2018 figures?
- ▶ Use these Management Hints to guide you through the year.

WHERE CAN I MAKE SAVINGS IN 2019?

Any good manager would spend a full day in the office planning this. The following are a few pointers for you.

- ▶ Fertilisers: It estimated that it will cost €460+ per hectare to apply the basics plus ‘allowed N’ this year. Where can you save?
 - Use Urea instead of CAN to end May or for full year will save €46.5 and €64.65 per ha respectively.
 - If you want to be environmentally responsible, use protected Urea (38 per cent N + 7 per cent S) and save €9.9 and €16.3 over CAN +S for half year and full year respectively,
 - If you have not put on any P or K yet, the best value compound is 10:10:20 (€425/ton approx.)
- ▶ Meal: If stocked at 2.5 cows/ha and you feed 100kgs/cow less, that’s a saving of €26/cow or €65/ha – only reduce meal by 0.5kg/cow/day over 200 days of meal feeding.
 - Save €20/ton on purchase price when feeding 0.5tons/cow/year results in a saving of €10/cow or another €25/ha. So price around, but more importantly know what type you want.
 - Co-ops, if they are serious about keeping farmers viable, will have to make a dairy ration with adequate magnesium being supplied by 1 to 1.5kgs ration per day.

€200-400/ACRE FOR RENTED GROUND = MADNESS!

- ▶ The average profit/cow from early (best farmers) Profit Monitors 2019 was €690. This is the average; some guys were at €200/cow.

- ▶ How can anyone make money out of these rental costs which are the expectations out there now?
 - Add to this rental cost the repayment of €270/yr (7 year loan for heifer) and a labour cost of €300/cow. Investment in facilities will be €2000+/cow, which would be €270/cow repayments for 10 years.
 - To make things worse, most of these farms for renting/leasing are Soil Indices 1; therefore, requiring an investment of €200/acre to go to Index 3. Add to this 3 tons lime/acre at a cost of €75. You have to apply fertiliser, otherwise you will not grow the quantity of grass to pay the rent.
 - Madness to work for nothing! Buyer beware! Do your sums.
- ▶ We know from the greenfield site farm in Kilkenny, where the land is rented long-term at €180/acre for very good land, that they are effectively only breaking even (lost money in 2018) when paying for everything and with a low cost investment in facilities. A clear message!
- ▶ Why aren’t lessee farmers taking Brexit into account? It is obvious that land owners are because they are trying to get best prices before its effect kicks in.
- ▶ So what should you pay? If the best land in Kilkenny struggles to make a profit at €180/acre it is obvious that the rental cost is away below that.
 - This farm, very well run, does give a clear blueprint to ‘would-be’ land lessees.
 - It seems as if few are ‘taking any heed’ of the outcomes.
- ▶ I met a young lad’s father after mass a few Sundays ago, doing all those things but only leasing the farm for five years. He will need to go to mass every day for divine help!
 - Fathers/mothers, advisers, auctioneers, accountants, co-op personnel have a major responsibility in making those situations a “win-win” for all sides.
 - The land owner is being helped by getting the €22,500 tax free for a 10+ year lease. Let’s all protect the lessee!

USE THE SPRING ROTATION PLAN TO ENSURE APRIL GRASS

- ▶ To make April grass happen you must have 30 per cent and 60 per cent of the milking platform area grazed by the 1st March and 15th March respectively,
 - Not achieving these targets will mean you will be short of grass during April, if heavily stocked, equals more meals. And you will not be able to go a stocking rate of 4.7-4.9 cows per hectare until well into May. Therefore, you will be short of silage.
- ▶ Use the spring rotation planner to make this plan. It available on Agrinet, PastureBase or through your Adviser.
 - From March 1st, if you are short of the 30 per cent grazed you must increase the area being grazed/day so as to achieve 60 per cent + on

March 17th.

- ▶ As you only give a certain proportion (specific area) of the farm each day regardless of the amount of grass on it, you have to “read the signs” so as to make the correct decisions :
 - If there is a lot of grass on that area and cows are not grazing it out well, reduce the meals – don't be afraid to only feed 1kg/day,
 - If they are ‘skinning’ the area and look empty or discontented you must increase the meals or feed some high quality silage as a last resort for a few days.
- ▶ Cows must be brought in off the field after 2.5 - 3 hours grazing ,
 - If out longer, even on fine days on dry land, they will be walking around, eating very little and poaching the land – one of the big reasons for poor growth.
- ▶ Cows, when eating more than 8kg DM/hd/day, should be out twice per day ,
 - Plan the day as follows: At 7am, milk and feed 1-2 kg meal, let them out for 3 hours, bring them in at 11.30-12 mid-day, and leave them in cubicle shed with no feed, milk again at 2pm. with 1-2 kg meal, leave out on grass from 4 -6pm, bring into cubicle shed for the remainder of night with no feed.

YOU'RE PLAN TO UTILISE 14TONS GRASS/HA:

- ▶ Being a key KPI (Key Performance Indicator) we must plan to make it happen.
- ▶ You haven't a chance of achieving it unless all fields on farm have a pH of 6.3, all are Index 4's for P & K – no more talk on that – just do it! Reseeding also is a big help.
- ▶ You must make a Grassland Plan for the year now, so that the acreage you have is adequate to provide grazing and silage for all livestock being kept. I have an Excel programme for that but it works as follows by providing the following grazing hectares :
 - Apr-May: 4.7-5.0 cows/Ha; 2500kgs (cattle wt.)/Ha and 23 calves/Ha,
 - June-July: 3.6-3.9 cows/Ha; 2200kgs/Ha; 14calves/Ha
 - Aug-Sept: 2.7-2.9 cows/Ha; 1700kgs/Ha; 7 calves/Ha.
 - Once these areas have been allocated the remaining area of the farm must be cut for a heavy silage cut. (With the nitrate restrictions you have no chance of having enough silage unless you close large areas of the farm and take heavy cuts).
 - You will know I am not in favour of a grazing system that involves taking out surplus bales – only rarely when we have massive growth.
- ▶ From this plan you know the area being grazed by the cows from April to October and this will be managed using the grass wedge.
 - The pre grazing cover (PGC) for a SR of 4.7 per ha and a 21 day rotation for a 550 kg cow producing 2kgs MS/cow (means 17kgs DM/cow of a daily requirement) is calculated as follows:

$4.7 \times 17 \times 21 + 50 = 1730 \text{ kgs DM}$ with an AFC of 800kgsDM/ha. (50 = post grazing height of 50cms).

- ▶ In my experience, so as to be able to graze cows at 4.7+ per hectare from 15-20 April, one needs to be have an average farm cover (AFC) of over 650kgs/ha in early April. This is only achieved by:
 - Having the specific % areas grazed,
 - Having adequate levels on N applied in time,
 - And by feeding the required levels of meal as directed by a grass budget.

TARGET 10 + GRAZINGS PER PADDOCK IN 2019:

- ▶ Why? Because every extra grazing results in that paddock growing 1.3 tons of dry matter more in the year. A phenomenal pieces of knowledge! Let's do it... how?
- ▶ The first big step towards achieving this is to complete the 1st rotation on 1st April or as early as possible for your soil type. Why? Because by finishing on the 1st April instead of 10th April you have picked up 10 days of this extra rotation you planning for.
- ▶ By not starting the last rotation until the 10 October you only have to achieve 8 grazings in 190 days, which gives you an average rotation length of 24 days per rotation.
- ▶ Therefore, the two key targets are to end the 1st rotation as early as possible and start the last rotation as late as possible.

GRAZE SILAGE FIELDS TWICE

- ▶ If you want to reduce meal costs then you should graze silage ground twice before closing, particularly on the milking platform;
 - This is so because more grazed grass is available.
 - This practice saves huge meal bills in early April,
- ▶ It will only delay silage cutting by a few days because growth rates will be over 90 in late May compared with 30 kg DM per day in early April.
- ▶ There will also be a strong possibility of split cuttings of 1st cut:
 - Facilitates the availability of after grass over a longer period.
- ▶ To push this concept to its limit the silage ground must be grazed from 10th-20th April , giving an average closing date of 15th April :
 - So, work backwards on your silage area to set this up,
 - Silage will be cut between the 5th and 12th June and will have a DMD of over 70 per cent.
- ▶ Therefore, on the milking platform with this plan, silage fields will be grazed the 2nd time from 8th to the 18th April. These paddocks will have had to been grazed the first time from 20 to 28 Feb (approx).
 - With this in mind, graze your paddocks now accordingly.

WEIGHT MAIDEN HEIFERS NOW

- ▶ Bulling heifers must now weigh 53 per cent of their mature weight:
 - That is 295kgs for a Friesian and 285kgs for a



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Jersey - Cross on 1st March.

- ▶ There are two problems with bulling heifers on dairy farms:
 - Most of them are not big enough at calving
 - We have too few AI bred heifers with very high EBIs with high % F & P available.
- ▶ To produce enough heifers from your own herd you must :
 - Plan to bull all your cows and bulling heifers once/twice with an AI Friesian or Jersey. This will be elaborated on in April management hints,
 - Make sure not to let any Friesian heifer calf die
 - You must make sure now that this year's bulling heifers are big enough for bulling in May.
- ▶ Conception rates will be best if:
 - They weigh 320-340 kg at mating start date (MSD),
 - They are on the 3rd heat on service day,
 - They are well used to the grass diet at that time (let them out early March).
 - No injections within one month MSD.
 - Adequate cover for minerals, particularly Iodine.
- ▶ Manage animals accordingly to achieve these objectives.
- ▶ Let out big yearlings heifers (290+ kg) onto grass immediately:
 - They will lose weight for 2-4 weeks (gut-fill) after let out,
 - They will be well conditioned into the grass environment by the time the breeding season start.
- ▶ 'Small' bulling heifers are the issue and they represent the potential of your herd to expand next year or give you an extra cash income of €1500+ each. Therefore, consider your options with them:
 - A 'small' yearling heifer is one weighing less than 240 kg on 1st March,
 - There are 60 days to 1st May which is an appropriate MSD,
 - With good grass they will put on 1.0 kg/hd/day of live weight gain,
 - With good grass and 1-2 kg meal for some of the time they will do 1.25 kg/day,
 - They may be still a little light, so it is suggested you delay their bulling date for 15 - 20th May or even later and serve with a Jersey, which, even though not totally advisable represents a far better option than carrying them over for another year.
- ▶ Vaccinate for BVD, IBR and leptospirosis now or over next two weeks, (do the cows also):
 - This is a 'must do' job for most herds,
 - It must be done 3-4 weeks (at least) before bulling.
- ▶ Stock them on grass at 2,500 kg weight per hectare, or seven to nine per hectare until July,
 - Equally a copper bolus may be required if copper deficiency is a problem on your farm,
 - Also address iodine where necessary.
- ▶ A let out worm does is not necessary for these animals (or any other yearlings)

- Don't waste money?
- But if Fluke, Liver or Rumen, is a problem (check dung sample) dose before let-out.

MANAGING CALVING DATE FOR PROFIT?

- ▶ Accidentally or otherwise it seems as if cows/heifers are calving a week or so ahead of planned calving dates. This seems to be due the use of short gestation bulls on cows sired by similar bulls. It begs the question of when is too early?
- ▶ From an economic point of view it is important to get your start of calving date correct:
 - If you start too early, you will have to feed lots of meal as you won't have enough grass,
 - January calvers will milk 30-50 kg milk solids less than February calves
- ▶ Laurence Shalloo, Moorepark, has shown the following incomes for 455,000 litre farmer with mean calving dates of:

Milk Price	January 15	February 15	March 15	April 15
22.3 c/l	€14,503	€19,764	€13,296	€5,446
30.0 c/l	€56,027	€59,280	€50,670	€39,879

- ▶ The national mean calving date is 6-8th March and we must push it back to the 15th February in the South and 25th February in the Northern areas.
 - Late calving is resulting in huge loss of production 60-100 kg per cow of milk solids.
 - Therefore, we must calve 70% of our cows in February, starting on 27th January on dry farms.
 - Check your 2018 calving report for your median calving date so that you can decide what to do.
- ▶ The bulling heifers are the solution because you can arrange their calving date the first year.
 - Therefore, they must calve before the cows every year,
 - Remember, the calving date slips 4-6 days per year, so an animal that calves on 1st March in one year will calve on the 4th March the next year and the 8th March the next year etc. in subsequent years
- ▶ Two things are now important to maximise the number of heifers that calve down in the first 3 weeks of calving next spring:
 - Adequate size, and
 - Synchronisation (covered next month)
- ▶ The target time from start of calving date to medium calving date (when you have half of your herd calved) is 15 days, therefore, based on above you should :
 - Know what yours is this year?
 - Start calving on 28 January on dry land or southern counties,
 - Start calving on cold, wettish or Northern farms on the 1-6th February.
- ▶ For now, check the number of days from start of calving to middle cow calved for your herd as it tells you a lot about your fertility management:
 - For many farmers it is 25-30 days (target =15-20 days) which indicates an infertile herd, poor submission/conception rates, disease problems,

poor AI techniques, bad feed management etc.

- Which of these can you cross off your list of possible causes?
- ▶ Some very fertile herds must be careful, allowing what is written above, that they may be now calving too early, particularly if stocked at more than 3 cows/ha.

BITS AND PIECES FOR MARCH

- ▶ Condition score the whole herd now; cows that are a BCS of 2.75 or less should be put on OAD milking, but continue to feed well.
- ▶ Continue dry cow minerals to March, April, calves.
- ▶ Feed magnesium to milkers at grass if on low levels of meals. They need 2-3 oz/cow/day.
- ▶ If feeding cows' milk to calves, feed the morning's milk as the

evenings milk is worth more to sell because it is higher in % fat and protein (worth 0.5-1.5 c/l),

- Feed milk replacer (not cow's milk) to replacement heifer calves to prevent the spread of Johne's disease at 6 litres/day.
- Let out suck calves to grass in early March as they will thrive as good as indoor reared calves, have less disease and you will have less work:
- Give them a fresh area of grass every 5-6 days,
- Provide straw in a rack at all times,
- Feed 1 kg meals/calf/day but protect against bird contamination (Coccidiosis)
- Before disposing male calves, check their EBI – it

may be very high and they could be valuable.

- ▶ Contract Mate: some farmers have very low EBI herds, being particularly low in genetics to get a good price for milk due to low % F & P genetics. I suggest:
 - That these farmers would enter into a contract NOW with very good farmers (I have a list) and buy high quality genetic heifer calves from them in Feb 2020.
 - They themselves could put all their cows in calf to AI Beef sires and make really good money for such calves.
 - What is now happening is that the very good guys are only now AI'ing with dairy for 3-4 weeks and then beef AI.
 - I have a number of farmers who have done it with good satisfaction.
- ▶ Milk recording is a must do now as there is much more you can do in terms of cow selection for mating or culling.
- ▶ Farm roadways, particularly damaged ones, must be resurfaced to prevent lameness – serious consequences to BCS and peak milk yield at this time of year.
- ▶ Start researching the AI bull catalogues/Active Bull list for the best and most suitable AI bulls for your farm and cows. Delay choice until late March/April as list becomes update.

“It is hard to imagine a more stupid or a more dangerous way of making decisions than by putting these decisions in the hands of people who pay no price for being wrong”

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