

## Messages:

- ▶ Address the targets for June and act.
- ▶ Take great care not to miss heat; target no calvings after 10 April 2021
- ▶ Is the drought over? What actions?
- ▶ Adhere to 'normal' grassland management needs.
- ▶ Make adequate quantities of quality silage.
- ▶ Make sure all stock have enough water.
- ▶ Practice good grazing management to minimise calf doses.
- ▶ Kale should be sown now!

### JUST WANT TO SAY...

- ▶ Some good always comes out of adversity; Covid-19 has resulted in better communication using technical facilities like online video calls; less people calling to the farm (which can be a huge time waster); being able to 'make do' with what we have because shops not open; more family time, etc.
- ▶ It has resulted in more family help being available.
  - ▶ This is good and is resulting in savings on casual labour.
  - ▶ Have you spent time teaching family how to measure grass, how to identify cows in heat, how to milk cows correctly, etc.
- ▶ On the downside many people working with the Farm Relief Services (FRS) are getting no farm relief work.
  - ▶ Will they be available to you when you want them next year?
  - ▶ I think you should consider giving your usual FRS worker a few days now and again – they will appreciate your thoughtfulness in the future.
- ▶ Dr Nollaig Heffernan recently outlined WHY we should employ staff:
  - ▶ To add time to your roster – how is that some people never have time for anything?
  - ▶ To allow you a change of focus – remove yourself from day-to-day tasks.
  - ▶ To allow you liberate personal time – if someone told you that you have 3 months to live, how would you spend that time?
  - ▶ To allow you create opportunities on the farm or outside the farm.
  - ▶ To allow you acquire a skillsets, - an underestimated stimulus for a person.
  - ▶ For company.

### TARGETS FOR JUNE?

- You are under performing if you are not achieving the following standards in June:
- ▶ A milk drop of less than 2½% from week to week.
  - ▶ A post grazing height of 4 to 4.25 cms (use plate metre to confirm)
  - ▶ Grazing quality grass (80+% DMD) by grazing covers of 1600 kgs DM/ha.
  - ▶ Have 76% of your annual Nitrogen used by 2nd week of June.

- ▶ Less than 20% of the paddocks with tall grass (dung-pads).
- ▶ 80% of your silage made by mid-June.
- ▶ All slurry tanks empty.
- ▶ SCC less than 150,000.
- ▶ TBC less than 15,000
- ▶ 75% of your cows' in-calf after 42 days.
- ▶ All heifers must be in-calf.
- ▶ Are you on target to have less than 10% of cows calving in April 2021?
- ▶ Still using high EBI bulls of short gestation.
- ▶ Cows on no meals,
- ▶ Calves on no meals.
- ▶ Incalf heifers weighing 350-380kgs

### AIM TO FINISH BREEDING IN JUNE

- ▶ The minimum cost of a missed heat is €250. It could be much greater (€800 - €1000) if it results in the cow not in-calf at the end of the season.
- ▶ National figures are extremely worrying; Calving Interval = 390 days; 6 Week calving rate = 65% (v target of 90%), cows culled per year = 21% and the average age at culling = 4.4 lactations (Target = 5.5). Serious financial losses!
- ▶ This period of reproductive management is all about using the RECORDS to guide heat expectations and subsequent actions. I hope you not too busy to use the RECORDS.
- ▶ Minimise this problem by answering a few questions:
  - ▶ What % of my cows/heifers are repeating?
  - ▶ Use the ICBF website to answer this question for you or examine your breeding chart.
  - ▶ If more than 25% of cows are repeating then you have a problem.
  - ▶ A NRR (non-return-rate) of over 65% for cows served more than 28 days is the target - may seem very high but some of them will 'break' later in the time.
  - ▶ Rank yourself against target in Table 1 and act.

Table 1: Herd Fertility Targets for June

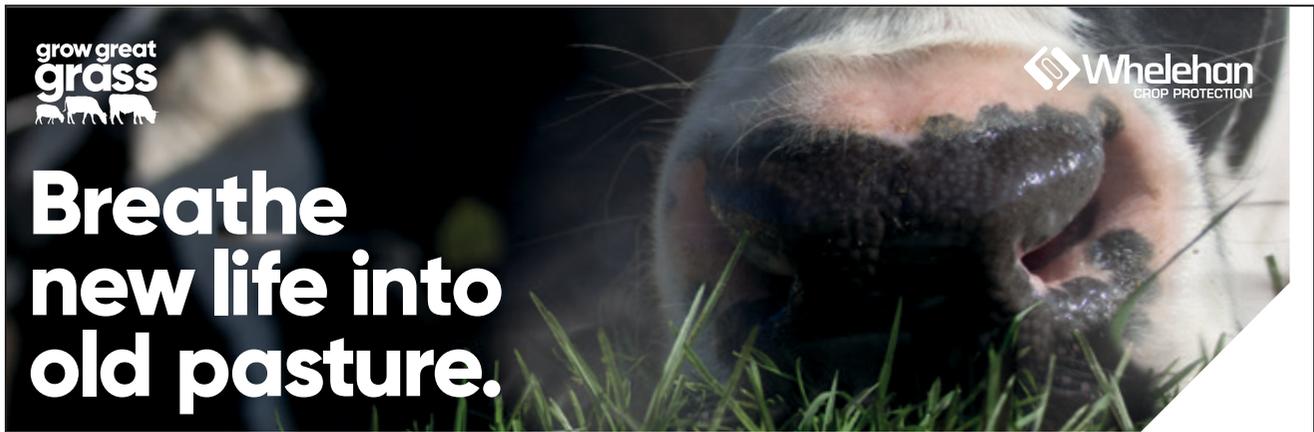
Assessment Index	Very Poor	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good
%Non-detected oestrous	>40	40-20	20-15	15-10	<10
%18-24 day return Intervals	<50	50-60	60-62.4	62.5-65	>65
% cows needing 3 services	>30	30-25	25-16	16-12	<12
% cows needing 4 services	>17	17-12	12-6	6-4	<4
% cows culled empty/year	>13	13-10	10-7	7-5	<5

- ▶ The possible causes of the problem may be some or all the following:
  - ▶ Cows are underfed due to tight grazing, shortage of grass, stemmy grass, letting cows out directly after milking onto 12 hour grazing block or very wet conditions.
  - ▶ Cows are too thin or losing weight.
  - ▶ Bad semen (infertile bull – check in your discussion group if any particular bull is causing more repeats).
  - ▶ Cows under stress due to lameness, mastitis, lack of water, stray electricity (don't under estimate), health issues (IBR, BVD, Neospora, Leptospirosis, Fluke).
  - ▶ Cows are under stress on service day or when the heat

was due.

- ▶ Service procedure was poor (never presume you or your technician are perfect AI men). Over 70 % of repeat service must be between day 18 and 24.
- ▶ Genetically, herd is infertile,
- ▶ Minerals may be a problem (could be iodine, copper, selenium or cobalt).
- ▶ Cows being served in June will calve from 11 March to 10 April 2021.
  - ▶ Do everything within your power to have all cows incalf in June:
  - ▶ The following short gestation Friesian bulls should be considered as their gestation length is minus 11 - 13 days (worth over €70/cow profit next year) ; FR4482, FR4717, 4902, FR4496, FR4478, FR4021.
  - ▶ Compare them to beef bulls who are all plus days
  - ▶ Continue serious heat detection; harder now as 1 cow/day/100 cow herd will be only on heat and she will only be mounted 11 time (compared with 50+ during first 3 weeks).
  - ▶ Top up paint daily if needs-be.
  - ▶ The optimum time to AI is 12 to 24 hrs after the onset on standing heat.
  - ▶ When a cow has been served, mark the cow's shoulder, so as not to reserve her again the day after, as this can cause the loss of pregnancy as well as being €15-20 down the drain.

- ▶ Repaint or put on the scratch card the day after service.
- ▶ Scan all cows 30 days after Mating Start Date (MSD)
  - ▶ Why? You will identify non-pregnant cows and weak pregnancies; therefore, with records you can resynchronised them and they will be bred 10 days later.
  - ▶ This scanning takes place once/week for three week, as follows for a MSD of 1st May:
  - ▶ 6th June (37 days post MSD) all cows served week 1 of AI
  - ▶ 13th June (44 days post MSD) all cows served week 2 of AI
  - ▶ 20th June (51 days post MSD) all cows served week 3 of AI
  - ▶ Records will help you with this beneficial task but you need a highly competent scanner.
  - ▶ Managing stock bull – I don't recommend them as they are an excuse for opting out of heat detection and carry a huge risk of more cows calving in late April- May (the target for April calving = 10%)
  - ▶ You need one young bull for every 10 empty cows or one mature bull for every 25 empty cows (=very expensive),
  - ▶ Rotate bulls every 24 hours and don't bring on the walk to the milking parlour.
  - ▶ He must have had all the necessary vaccines, not be



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- lame, footbath on arrival, and be fertility tested.
- ▶ To avoid the “Lull” in calving after the introduction of the bulls continue AI’ing for 10-14 days after introducing the bull until less than 2 cows/day need to be served by the bull.
- ▶ Vasectomised bulls are very useful but should not be used when more than 2 cows/100 cow herd/day are on heat.
  - ▶ You must use a chin-ball on him – top up the paint regularly,
  - ▶ Reduce injuries by training him with the heifers,
  - ▶ Remove him when the vasectomised group of females are due to repeat,
  - ▶ Young bulls court cows 24 hours before standing heat, marking them on the side – the marking must be on the top of the back.

## DROUGHT: IS IT OVER?

- ▶ As I write these notes we are heading for a drought and weather forecast isn’t good; therefore, a few brief notes are required.
  - ▶ Some farmers may think they are in drought conditions before they actually are; so assess.
  - ▶ According to the IFJ, most of the country, bar the south-west, has a moisture deficit of greater than 50mm, which indicates growth is affected. That’s a lot of rain to make things normal!
- ▶ Use weather forecasts, soil moisture deficits info on IFJ, and your own data from previous drought years on your farm to make a good decisions.
- ▶ The following ideas may help:
  - ▶ ‘Minding’ grass is not a good idea in a drought, while at the same time feeding a lot of meal and silage. Why?
    - ▶ Grass gets stemmy,
    - ▶ The grass will disappear ‘into the ground’ or burn off, hence lost! After rain, nearly half the grass remaining on the farm will be lost.
    - ▶ When the rain comes any strong grass will rot and be wasted.
    - ▶ Graze down to 400kgs/ha DM AFC before you supplement silage for grass. Then act with extra feed.
    - ▶ Keep the rotation length at around 30 days (if milking platform is 60ha, then allow 2 ha/day). If only 8 kgs DM grass available on that area per cow then the

- balance, 10kgs DM, must be made up with meals and silage.
- ▶ If there is enough grass in the diet, then no silage is required but 5-6 kgs ration plus 3-4 kgs PKE/hulls/pulp (out of parlour) could be fed. Farmers last time round fed PKE in mobile troughs, moving from paddock to paddock.
- ▶ Make sure to graze out to 4cm – that long fibre is very valuable now.
- ▶ Keep using CAN, at 25kgs/ha(20 units/acre), but if soil moisture deficit on your farm is greater than 60mm, don’t spread any until forecast tell you rain is coming.
- ▶ Destocking, selling cull cows, on some farms might be a good idea, while OAD milking might have to be considered on others.
- ▶ When rain arrives; feed cows well as they will be very unhappy;
  - ▶ Therefore, silage, high quality bales would be great, must now be fed with appropriate meals.
  - ▶ If little or no growth has taken place since last N then apply the appropriate quantity for the time of the year. However, be careful not to overdo as there may be a risk of nitrate poisoning.
  - ▶ At, or near, the end of drought it might be worth considering reseeding some old pastures.

## ‘NORMAL’ GRASS MANAGEMENT IN JUNE

- ▶ For those of you in ‘normal’ situations:
  - ▶ Depends on how well you have grazed out paddocks in May and graze low covers now.
  - ▶ If badly grazed out, paddocks must be topped low 2½ inches so as to set-up quality grass for next rotation.
  - ▶ The pre-grazing grass cover must not be greater than 1600 kgs DM per hectare.
  - ▶ The following table gives the target covers to aim at 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)**
2.5	993	450
3.0	1171	540
3.	1350	630
4.0	1528	720

\*Stocking rate x Daily Allowance x Rotation Length + Post grazing height  
 \*\*Stocking rate x recommended cover per livestock unit.



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- ▶ If stocking rate is greater than 4 cows/ha and assuming growth rate of 80 kgs DM/ha/day, and a 21 day rotation then 1 – 2 kgs meal/cow/day will have to be fed.
- ▶ If pre-grazing covers (PGC) and average farm covers (AFC) are greater than specified above, then take out the strong paddock for baled silage.
- ▶ If pre-grazing covers are greater than specified but AFC is below target (some farmers at present), be careful before you take out the strong paddock.
- ▶ The big message is to graze covers appropriate to your stocking rate but never, ever above 1700kgs.
- ▶ Measuring grass is the most important task in ensuring adequate quality grass availability while minimising topping.
- ▶ As topping is effectively wasting grass or utilising less of the grass grown, we must avoid topping as an option. 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.
- ▶ When the pre-grazing cover (PGC) is higher than your target, then that paddock must be cut for baled silage within 2-3 days of its due grazing date.
  - ▶ This material should be cut, very low at 3.5 cms, tedded or left in small rows for wilting, then bagged.
- ▶ This silage will be very good quality:
  - ▶ It will be 80%+ DMD and she be labelled and later fed to milking cows.
  - ▶ Aim to have 2-3 bales of this material for every 4 cows in herd so as to reduce your Autumn-Spring meal bill.
  - ▶ This material will be nearly as good as meal and will only cost half as much.
- ▶ The following are the nitrogen recommendations for July grass based on grazing stocking rates in June:

Cows/ha (June)	Units/acre
2.0 or less	14
2.0 - 2.5	21
2.5 - 3.0	28
3.0 - 3.5	28

- ▶ Because of outside parcels of land being understocked, more N than specified here should be applied on the MP; but stay within the overall farm nitrogen limit.
- ▶ On sulphur deficient farms you will get a response of 10 – 50% more grass by spreading 20 units/acre of sulphur between now and September.
- ▶ Because sulphur interferes

with copper don't use it if you don't need it.

### MAKE QUALITY SILAGE

- ▶ After farmer making a lot of bad (poorly preserved) silage last year and the consequences for BCS, we must review our approach to making it this year.
  - ▶ Cut it 6-7 weeks after closing; maybe in two separate cuts.
  - ▶ Cut it in dry weather; a few days delay doesn't make much of a difference.
  - ▶ Use an additive if sugars are low – acid still the best. Get a Refractometer to confirm sugar levels – co-ops also do same, as do Teagasc.
- ▶ You must have 80% of your silage (1st cut) in the pit before the end of June.
  - ▶ 2nd cuts are far too expensive.
- ▶ Because silage ground was grazed this year, quality will be good and it may be difficult to preserve.
  - ▶ If nitrogen levels are high, wilting is the only solution.
  - ▶ Always plan to cut in the afternoon in dry weather – sugars are high.
- ▶ Over the last few years we have had fewer fish kills due to silage effluent, let's keep it that way by collecting all effluent.
- ▶ Bare silage fields, provides an ideal opportunity to empty all slurry tanks:
  - ▶ Last real chance to spread large quantities of slurry.
  - ▶ Spread at 2000 – 3000 gallons per acre immediately silage has been cut and apply the nitrogen (65units/acre) 6-7 days later (never, ever apply the nitrogen before slurry because N losses will be great)
  - ▶ Dilute slurry in tanks with water to minimise loss of ammonia to the atmosphere and increase the

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efficiency of nitrogen to grow more grass.

- ▶ No one should be using a splash to spread slurry in this era.
- ▶ Slurry gas kills without giving you any warning, so be extremely careful when agitating by keeping children, other adults, animals and yourself out of the house during agitation.

## WATER IS ESSENTIAL

- ▶ Cows and cattle require large amounts of water every day for growth and production.
- ▶ Requirement per cow varies, depending on moisture content of feed, sunshine and milk yield per cow, but will vary from 15-30 gallons/cow/day.
- ▶ Flow rate;
  - ▶ This is approx 14 litres/cow/hour or 70 litres/cow/5 hours.
  - ▶ 100cows require  $100 \times 14 = 1400$  litres/hour. Or 25 litres/minute.
  - ▶ To check your farm flow rate: Mark water level on trough. Empty a known volume while holding the ballcock (eg. 10 x 10 litre buckets = 100 litres). Hold the ballcock down and time how long it takes to get to the mark. Divide the litres removed by the time taken, say 100 litres in 2 mins = 50 litres/minute, to get flow rate.
- ▶ Water quality affects intake; therefore ensure troughs and supply are clean.
- ▶ Drinking occurs several times per day at feeding, milking times or in groups (many come when they see another drinking). The implications are;
  - ▶ Troughs under electric fences restrict access – heifers suffer. Situate in the middle of the paddock.
  - ▶ Animals generally will not travel more than 300 metres for water.
  - ▶ The size should be at least half the one hour flow rate; therefore, 100 cows require 700 litres, as calculated above.

## PREVENT HOOSE/STOMACH WORMS

- ▶ I am not a believer of the kill all parasites solution to parasite control; my approach is let the animal build up some immunity – the Covid term “Herd Immunity”.
- ▶ For hoose, you should not dose calves until a few of the strong calves start to cough. Then do all calves with a white or yellow dose;
- ▶ This bestows immunity to the calf and he/she will not usually get hoose again in its lifetime.
- ▶ For stomach worms, dose all calves in late June/early July

with a white or yellow dose, leave them in same field for a few days and then move to aftergrass

- ▶ As stomach worm infection is predictable, they could get reinfected if they are not kept on “clean pastures”, that is fields that didn’t have calves grazing yet this year.
- ▶ Rotate them round the aftergrass as long as possible, and no dose will be necessary during this period.
- ▶ If you then practice the leader-follower system with the in-calf heifers there will be no need for a further dose until housing. Having the older heifers in the system will increase growth over the summer 0.2 kgs/day - because the calves will be getting the best of the grass (top) where no parasites live.
- ▶ If bulling heifers or 1st calver show symptoms of hoose (coughing) or stomach worms (sticky dung around tail head) they will have to be dosed.
- ▶ Late or small calves: Use the “buddy-buddy” system to rear them;
  - ▶ Pair two calves together in several cow paddock and leave them there for the remainder of the summer. (10 calves require 5 paddocks)
  - ▶ They will get a fantastic thrive because they will be eating fantastic quality grass all the time with no exposure to parasites. Therefore, no dosing or meal required.

## BITS AND PIECES

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

	% Cow Weight	Holstein Fr	Jersey X
Bulling heifers (R2's)	63%	370	345
Calves (R1's)	23%	135	127

- ▶ Any animal under these weights must be separated out and get priority grass or be fed 1-2kgs meal.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Sow kale now – particularly important for farmers with low levels of winterfeed due to the drought.
- ▶ Change liners at 2000 milkings;
- ▶ If you have 8 rows being milked twice per day, then each liner does 16 milkings per day. Therefore, you will need to change liners after 125 days (2000 divided by 16) or 4.25 months. Now.

**Quotation: “When your values are clear to you, making decisions comes easier”**