

MESSAGES:

- ▶ **Managing grass through and after a drought.**
- ▶ **Manage summer grass by measuring to avoid cutting too many bales.**
- ▶ **Plan the end of breeding season.**
- ▶ **Feed grass with Nitrogen (2 applications remain), P & K plus Sulphur.**
- ▶ **Oct/Nov grazed grass is worth €1.70/cow/day more profit. Plan NOW!**
- ▶ **Weigh replacements NOW and act.**
- ▶ **Weeds are costing farmers €10 – 25 per ha per year.**
- ▶ **Seriously consider clover in your perennial swards.**
- ▶ **Prevent skin cancer by responsible actions.**

By Matt Ryan

MANAGING GRASS THROUGH & AFTER A DROUGHT

- ▶ Many farmers are suffering serious grass shortage. If still in trouble, stay on a 21-23 day rotation, feeding the balance with meals 5-7kgs and silage (preferably, quality bales).
- ▶ Nitrogen (CAN) at 20 units/acre should be maintained so as to have N in the soil when rain comes. There is merit in applying it 3-5 days before grazing while there is a cover of grass available with some moisture to dissolve the N.
- ▶ When the rain comes slow down the rotation length drastically (up to 30 days) for the first 10-13 days so as to let the pre-grazing cover (PGC) build up to near ideal.
- ▶ Measure grass twice per week to stay in control of a changing grass situation.

MANAGE SURPLUS GRASS BY MEASURING

- ▶ To maintain the highest quality grass and minimise topping, grass cover should match stocking rate and rotation length.
- ▶ The following target grazing covers are suggested:

Stocking Rate Cows/ha	Rotation Length (days)	Daily demands (Kg Dm/Ha)	Pre-Grazing Cover (Kgs DM/Ha)	Average Farm Cover Kgs Dm/Ha
4.0	25	72	1850	800
3.5	25	63	1625	700
3.0	25	54	1400	600
2.7	25	49	1275	540
2.47	25	45	1175	490
2.20	25	40	1050	440

- ▶ Your DIY to estimating grass cover is as follows:
 - a Establish your stocking rate (cows per hectare) on the grazing area.
 - b Work on a rotation length of 25 days approx. – it could be 21-22 days if growth is over 70kg DM/day (possible).
 - c Calculate daily demand per hectare by multiplying your stocking rate by 18 which is the kgs of dry matter that should be given to a cow for a day.
 - d Calculate the pre-grazing cover by multiplying the rotation length by your daily grass demand and adding on post-grazing residual, targeted at 50kgDM/ha
 - e Finally, calculate the average farm cover required by multiplying your stocking rate by 200 (220 in wet land) – 180 would be ok with high growth rates.
- ▶ If the pre-grazing grass cover is greater than the target figure, then the “strong” paddocks should be removed for cutting only if the average farm cover is also greater than the target.
- ▶ If the pre-grazing and average farm covers are less than the targets, then meal (10-12% P) or baled silage (preferable option if silage not scarce) must be introduced.

Surplus Bales per ha for different Growth Rates and Grazing Stocking Rates on the Milking Platform (MP).

	Summer	Stocking	Rate	Cows/ha on MP	Overall
Annual Growth Tons DM/ha	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	*4.5 for 1 st Cut and then 3.5 for 2 nd Cut
10	3.3	- 1.3	- 5.8	- 10.3	- 3.8
12	7.2	2.6	- 1.9	- 6.4	- 0.1
13.5	12.1	7.6	3.0	- 1.5	5.0
15.5	17.3	12.7	8.2	3.6	9.0

*In this scenario, the MP is grazed at 4.5 cows/ha from 15th April-June and at 3.5 cows/ha during the 2nd cut period (Cut before 15 Aug).

- ▶ If you find yourself cutting too many bales on the milking platform, the table above has the answer.
 - ▶ You are under-stocked for the amount of grass you are growing.
 - ▶ You are not closing up enough ground for both 1st and 2nd cut silages.
 - ▶ Being stocked at 3 cows/ha and growing 12 tons grass will result in you making 7.2 bales/ha – a massive cost and inconvenience,



Management Hints

Conversely, if you are over-stocked for the amount of grass you are growing, you can see the amount silage you must introduce,

For every 4 bale/ha taken off you must apply 1000 gallons of undiluted slurry.

For these obvious reasons, any farmer who is not measuring grass and taking appropriate action is “not at the races”.

END OF BREEDING SEASON

- ▶ A breeding season of 12 -13 weeks should be plenty long enough – target 9 -12 weeks.
 - ▶ April calvers produce €200 – 400 per cow less milk than February calvers – check yours on your milk recording report.
- ▶ May calvers have no part to play in profitable dairying?
 - ▶ The cut-off date for no May calvers is 20th July.
 - ▶ Don't stop bulling until late July, even if you think you have enough replacements. But you must have enough acres to feed them.
 - ▶ It is still likely that there will be a demand for late calving milking cows next year, based on the demand this year but one never knows.
 - ▶ However, if you are tight on the number of replacements for expansion or replacement for disease issues, you should keep bulling cows with Jersey/Fr until late July.
 - ▶ All cows now being bulled should get an AI Jersey bull or very short gestation Friesian.
 - ▶ But remember, cows bulling late in the season indicate a fertility problem.
- ▶ The following service dates acts as a reminder of when calving will take place.

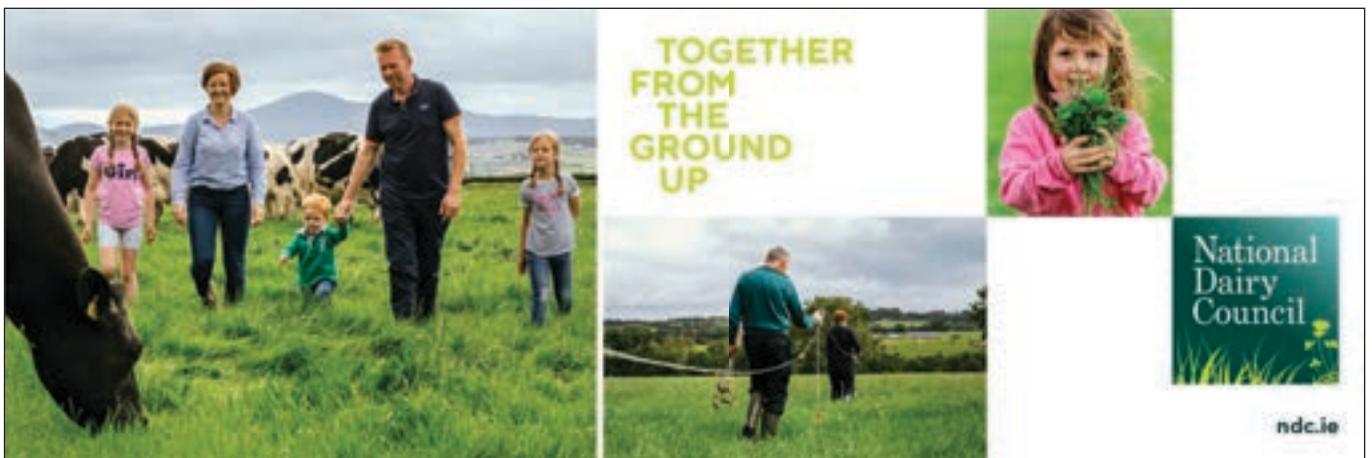
DATE OF SERVICE	DATE OF CALVING
July 12th	21st April
July 18th	27th April
July 14th	3rd May
July 30th	9th May

- ▶ Advised end of season service dates are as follows: July 18th on dry land; July 30th on “late” land.
- ▶ There is two to three weeks left in the bulling season.
 - ▶ Make use of that time,

- ▶ A short gestation bull,
- ▶ A stock bull with no calving data will only make things worse, so, make up your mind whether you are in milk or not
- ▶ Stay focused on heat detection and you will save a lot of money.
 - ▶ Every cull cow will cost €1000-€2500, depending on her age and EBI.
 - ▶ Every 5% culling over the Moorepark optimum rate of 18% results in a cost of €50 for every cow in your herd.
- ▶ You could justify scanning now if you have not been running a stock bull with the cows.
- ▶ I have serious reservations on recommending stock bulls to ‘mop-up’ the end of breeding because:
 - ▶ Many are infertile (1 in 10) and others become infertile (1 in 3)
 - ▶ If using one, check if many cows are repeating? You must keep a check on him.
 - ▶ If malfunctioning, get a new bull or revert back to A.I – many farmers are now successfully using very short gestation Friesian.
 - ▶ Remember, a missed heat now will cost you a culled cow.

GRASS CARE IN JULY

- ▶ There are only 2 nitrogen dressings of approx 28 units/acre each, left between now and year end. One now in mid-July and last in mid-September.
 - ▶ Farmers stocked at approx 2.5 cows/ha have only one dressing of 20-28 units/acre left for late August – early September.
 - ▶ If you have more used you have got your spreading programme wrong.
 - ▶ This is the time to review the quantity of N used versus your allowance.
- ▶ Nitrogen is a feed cost like meal but gives a return of 48% on the investment.
 - ▶ Use protected Urea as it better for the environment (lower losses etc.)
 - ▶ It is 11% cheaper than CAN and 11% more expensive than ordinary Urea but it is more efficient. Where 10 mm rain forecast within 24-36 hours use protected urea.
- ▶ If Soil Index for P and K are low:
 - ▶ Apply some P & K to improve growth and their content



in grass.

- ▶ Apply a high N compound with low P & K; but some farmers may have to apply 18:6:12 or 27:2.5:5.
- ▶ If extra K has to be applied, August is the best month.
- ▶ Apply 5 -10 units of Sulphur per acre.
- ▶ Empty all slurry and soiled water tanks now.

OCT – NOV GRASS PLAN FROM LATE JULY:

- ▶ October-November seems a long way off but if you don't plan and execute the build-up of grass from now you won't have enough grass in October- November. Why do you do this? Simply to have grass in the cows' diet so as to increase profitability per day by €1.70 per cow.
- ▶ Late July is the time to start the autumn build up of grass.
- ▶ Plan for a "3rd cut-silage Graze".
 - ▶ It is too expensive to cut 3rd cuts but very valuable to graze it.
 - ▶ It should be grazed in September.
 - ▶ Set 15-20% of the farm available for this management exercise.
 - ▶ Stock cow at 2.9 cows/ha on the grazing area and put the remainder aside for a "3rd-cut-graze". If this SR isn't possible if you are overstocked and you will have to feed extra meals to slow down the rotation in Aug-Sept.
- ▶ I say "go for it" because your approach to planning and managing aftergrass will be more positive.
- ▶ Having taken the second cut, preferably 25-31st July, the advice is:
 - ▶ Apply 60-70 units of N per acre, plus a little P & K in the form of Cut Sward.
 - ▶ Or, apply 1,500 - 2,000 gallons of slurry on the day silage is picked up plus 55-60 units of N, 5-7 days later.
- ▶ If this mythical 3rd cut is not being planned, you would only be spreading 40-50 units of N for aftergrass resulting in a lower yield of grass.
 - ▶ The extra 30 units of N applied, grows enough grass (270 kgs DM) on every acre which will feed 10-13 cows for an extra day.
 - ▶ If you close 15% of your farm for "3rd-cut-graze" this will allow you increase your rotation length by 6-9 days in September-October.
- ▶ Having set this '3-cut-graze' area aside you may run tight in grass for grazing, but there is no need to panic as you have

a number of options.

- ▶ Simply, go and graze some of the ground that has been closed up for this "3rd-cut-graze", or,
- ▶ Let the rotation length shorten in light of the fact that you have more grazing ground coming in, or,
- ▶ Feed surplus round baled silage previously cut from the paddocks to tide you over, or,
- ▶ Reduce stocking rates on the cow area,
- ▶ Meal feeding is the last option but may be the only worthwhile option on some high stocked farms.
- ▶ If you are using grazing ground for this purpose, give it the following attention:
 - ▶ Top it very tightly in July.
 - ▶ Apply 40-50 units per acre and do not graze for 5-6 weeks, which is until early September.
- ▶ All slurry tanks should be emptied on to second cut ground.

WINTER FEED REVIEW?

- ▶ Winter feed should not be a problem this year, except for those over-stocked, but it is prudent to review the situation now. You can review your stock options for the winter or if short take remedial action.
- ▶ Each cow needs 11 Kgs DM per day. Weanlings need 4.7 Kgs DM per day and incalf heifer/store animal need 8.5Kgs DM per day. Discount for any meal feeding planned.
- ▶ Best to do the sum on a dry matter basis.
- ▶ Quantity of silage in pit 300 tons (300,000 Kgs). Equals 60,000 Kgs DM (300 x 1000 x 0.20), if the silage is 20% dry matter. It is worth getting the silage analysed NOW.
- ▶ Livestock will eat the following per day (kgs DM): Cows = 11; R1's = 5; R2's = 9
- ▶ From this you can calculate if you are in deficit or surplus situation.
- ▶ Options available if in deficit:
 - ▶ Sell off livestock, buy meal, straw, or fodder beet/kale, rent ground for late second cut silage, rent silage pit and housing for €1.80 - €2.10 per cow per day.
 - ▶ To see which option is least expensive, cost all options out and use various combinations to make up the deficit.
 - ▶ Some farmers sell off cull cows in late July/Aug to allow more autumn grass for the remainder of the herd or to make baled silage.

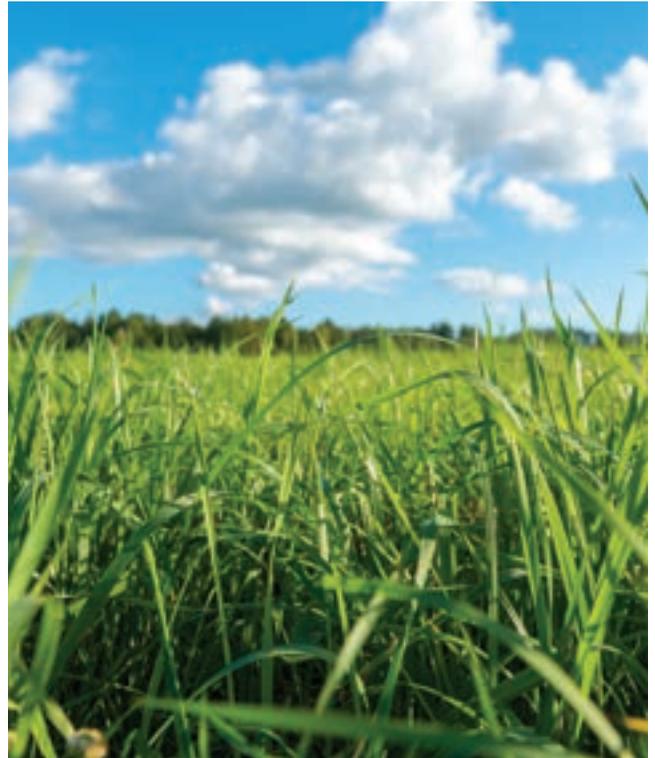
Management Hints

REPLACEMENT HEIFER MANAGEMENT

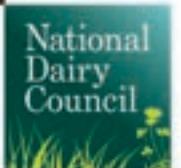
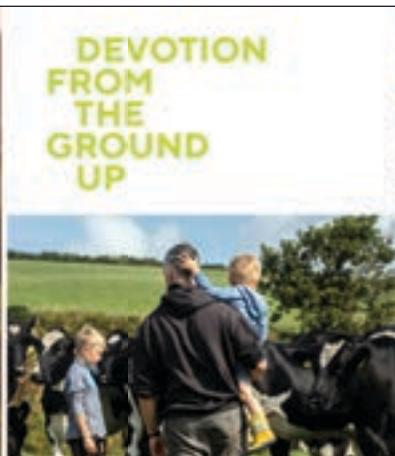
- ▶ Research the facts. R1's and R2's that are heaviest at 6, 12 and 15 months were more likely to remain in herd for 1st, 2nd and 3rd calving's and more likely to calve early for 1st calving's than lighter one. But heavier R1's and R2's will not remain in the system as long as the correct weight animals; neither will they go in calf as per expectations.
- ▶ Weigh both calves and in calf heifers now to establish where they are relative to target weights for 1st July?
 - ▶ Calves should be 27% of mature weight = 150kgs (for 550 kg herd)
 - ▶ Incalf heifers: 67% of mature weight = 370kgs (for 550 kg herd)
- ▶ The target weight gains from weaning to 6 months and target weights in July for calves with different mature weight mothers is as follows:

Cow Mature Wt.	450	500	550	600	650
Wt. Gain/hd/day	0.57	0.63	0.68	0.73	0.78
Target Wt. July	122	135	149	420	176

- ▶ Because all R2's are calving down at 1 year and 11 months these weight gains and targets should be slightly better.
- ▶ Therefore, give special management treatment; either meals or graze in front of older calves or heifers, to all animals below the target weight.
- ▶ Research has shown that moderate calves on 1st July can make good weanlings on 1st November if grazing management is top drawer.
 - ▶ It is all about feeding high quality grass to calves and heifers.
 - ▶ If you have them on good grass, they will gain 0.8 Kgs per day (100 Kgs in 125 days).
- ▶ Practice the Leader-Follower system.
 - ▶ Calves graze in front of the heifers or cows.
 - ▶ Calves will "do" really well with no adverse effect on the heifers.
 - ▶ Parasites will have no effect on the calves as they will be diluted.
- ▶ Or let the calves graze some of the cow paddocks.
 - ▶ Let them into covers of 900-1,100 Kgs DM.
 - ▶ Let them graze out the area in 3-4 days and then move on to next area.



- ▶ Some baling may have to be done on these paddocks next time round.
- ▶ All farms have late, "weak" calves.
 - ▶ Let these graze in front of the main bunch of calves on the very best of grass, or,
 - ▶ If that isn't possible give them fresh grass in front of cows or heifers,
 - ▶ 1-2 Kgs of meal could be justified to these but don't keep them near the house in a "calf paddock" to feed meals because parasites will prevent thrive, or,
 - ▶ Adopt the 'buddy-buddy' system where 2 small calves are put in each cow paddock and leave them there, even as cows come to the paddock. They will thrive really well and no meals or dosing is needed.
 - ▶ It is best to give best quality grass and no meals than to give them poor quality grass with meals.
- ▶ No meals should be fed to strong calves. The response is poor, requiring 8 Kgs of meal to give 1 Kg weight gain.



- ▶ To prevent stomach worms with minimum dosing, keep calves on aftergrass as long as possible. Give a white or yellow dose in early July and move to aftergrass.
- ▶ Under target weight incalf heifers, R2's, (they should all be incalf now) should be grazed in front of main bunch or run with the calves so as to get best grass.
- ▶ It is absolutely essential to get the weights as described above from the contract rearer. You don't want any animals underweight and no excessively over target weights.
- ▶ The use of excessive quantities of dosing in calves, as distinct from grazing management to control parasites, will result in young and old cows with low immunity. Thereby having to be dosed regularly as cows.

SPRAY FOR WEEDS

- ▶ At a time when farmers need to grow as much grass as possible (16+ ton DM/ha), it doesn't make sense to have weeds growing where grass should grow.
- ▶ Weeds and docks are costing farmers serious money, probably €10 - €25 per acre in lost grass production.
- ▶ Docks are a major economic cost to farmers because one dock (big one) every 35m² reduces grass yield by 1% per acre. As a rough guide every big dock in that area causes losses of €7 - €13.
- ▶ Decide on the spray to use; a decision mainly based on clover content of pasture. Be guided by manufacturers instructions. Clover Max is available as a clover safe spray.
- ▶ MCPA and 24D will kill most other weeds.
- ▶ Best results are got by spraying docks 3-4 weeks after cutting silage.
 - ▶ Grass growth is slow relative to the growth of the dock.
 - ▶ Grass ground cover is low resulting in lower loss of grass yield.
 - ▶ Spray now in July or August when there is great heat in the ground.
 - ▶ Spray on warm, sultry days.
 - ▶ Give serious consideration to spot spraying where docks are not too plentiful.
- ▶ Where weed infestation is low, we should "spot-spray" to minimise cost, be more effective and be a lot better environmentally.
- ▶ The best time to spray for ragwort is December-January

SOWING CLOVER

- ▶ No question, clover must now be a major part of our thinking from now on.
- ▶ Because a good clover sward can fix up to 4 bags of CAN /

acre and based on Clonakilty trial, results in 30kgs/cow more MS, and because of Nitrogen restrictions, we must consider establishing clover swards.

- ▶ In what situations should we consider its use at this time of year?
 - ▶ We must sow clover with perennial grasses – it is too late to stitch in/oversow clover.
 - ▶ Definitely on outside blocks of land used for silage or heifer replacement where lower levels of bag N would be in use.
 - ▶ If there are old grasses present, ploughing and tilling a clover/perennial seed mix should be embarked on.
- ▶ Soil fertility is very important, particularly lime (pH 6.5+) and P & K's must be index 3+.
- ▶ It must be sown before mid-August at latest to guarantee establishment before winter.
- ▶ Do all in your power to kill off docks in the old sward by spraying with roundup – that should be done in mid-July.
- ▶ With lots of silage in pits, this is a good year to embark on a reseeding programme. But plan and do in time. September is too late to avoid weed grasses growing and replacing perennial grasses.

PREVENT MELANOMA CANCER

- ▶ More people in Ireland, 13,000, get skin cancer each year than any other cancer. Of these, nearly 1,200 were due to melanoma. One in 3 men and 1 in 4 women get it in some shape or form in Ireland.
- ▶ As you know it is caused by ultra violet light from sun or sun beds. Many Irish farmers have fallen victim to it:
 - ▶ It can become life-threatening as fast as six weeks,
 - ▶ It can spread to other parts of the body.
 - ▶ It can appear on skin not exposed to the sun.
- ▶ Prevention is obvious, even if we take it for granted:
 - ▶ Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun,
 - ▶ Wear sunscreen all the time – apply first thing in the morning,
 - ▶ Wear protective clothing that covers your arms, legs, and face (a wide brimmed hat as it protects you face, ears and neck).
 - ▶ Wear sunglasses.

Remember: Managing a farm successful is a juggling act of timing, people, weather, livestock, deadlines, family, education, taxes, health, time off, on-farm investment, satisfaction, priorities, age and a whole lot of outside agencies.



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