

## MESSAGES:

- ▶ Aim for the May breeding targets, understand the ‘why’ and act quickly.
- ▶ “It is a no brainer: do the “Why Wait” and 32-day scan on whole herd.
- ▶ Use 1.5 to 2 AI straws per cow in your herd.
- ▶ Most farmers don’t manage the “grass wedge”. Do you?
- ▶ Two-thirds of your annual N must be applied before 21 May.

By Matt Ryan

## BREEDING TARGETS &amp; THE ‘WHY’

- ▶ This month is the driver of dairy farmers’ most important KPI, that is a 6-week calving rate of 90 per cent in 2022.
  - ▶ I heard a farmer at a recent virtual farm walk say... “the calving season went well.... We had 80 per cent calved in 6-week”. Is this good? At a loss of €8.22 for every 1 per cent below target, that represents a loss of €8,220 per 100 cow herd.
  - ▶ There are several markers/critical targets you must hit over the next 2 months to achieve that KPI.
- ▶ The following targets must be the goal and if not achieved you must address “Why”, otherwise, you are going to have a scattered calving pattern next year with late calvers and more cull cows:
 

▶ Submission rate (3 weeks)	90%
▶ Non return rate (NRR) to 1st service (Cows)	70%
▶ Non return rate (NRR) to 1st service (Heifers)	75%
▶ Non-Detected-Oestrus (NDO)	10%
▶ Normal (18-24 day) return interval	65%
▶ Repeat AI (1 -10 day) return interval	<10%
▶ Repeat AI (24+ days) return interval	<25%
▶ Scanned Pregnant at 32 days:(a) Cows	55%
(b) Heifers	65%
▶ Services per conception	1.7
▶ AI/Bull/Scanning/Drugs Costs	0.9 cents/litre
- ▶ You can’t measure these unless you keep good records:
  - ▶ Use the ICBF breeding chart and pocket notebook to record all breeding details on the ICBF site,
  - ▶ Use ICBF Herd Plus data from last year to establish where you are weak and use it this year to stay on top of problems arising.
  - ▶ Look at your recent ICBF reports to see if you can learn anything that will make this year’s breeding season more successful.
- ▶ Before I start ‘preaching’ I must bring a few research genetic facts to your attention:
  - ▶ The Fertility targets for B & W Cows = €110+
  - ▶ The Fertility targets for Jx Cows = €65+
  - ▶ If your herd is under these targets then:
    - » BCS will be 3.0 V 2.75.
    - » More endometritis (75% V 25%) at 6 weeks
    - » Lower cyclicity (85% V 20%) at 6 weeks,
    - » Weaker heats – 40% lower peak activity,
    - » Poorer conception rates to 1st service (33% V 56%)
- ▶ The 6-week in-calf rate will be 41% V 72 % for fertile cows.
- ▶ Therefore, don’t expect to make “a silver purse out of a sow’s ear”. If your herd is infertile you will have your breeding seasons’ ‘work cut out for you’.
- ▶ Never-the-less you must work harder during the season.
- ▶ Poor submission rates can be due to many factors but many farmers miss 20-40% of cows that are in-heat and 30 per cent of the herd should come in heat every week (or 4.3 per cent of the herd per day) for first 3 weeks:
  - ▶ Heat lasts on average 8 hrs (range 2-18 hrs and 55 per cent of cows have heats that last less than 8 hours) and the cow in heat only stands for 2-3 seconds for a “standing mount”- therefore, the cows’ will only be seen in “standing heat” for 1-2 minutes for all of the 2–18-hour period.
    - » Difficult! Also, if the heat period is disturbed (collecting for milking, strangers, dogs, people, machinery nearby, etc.), she may not stand for heat any more. Such breaks occur in 30-40 per cent of cows.
    - » Late calving cows have shorter heats.
  - ▶ Lame cows, often refuse to be mounted, so it best not to put on AI list. The same goes for mastitis.
  - ▶ 10-15 per cent of cow show heat at night and may not show signs in the morning.
  - ▶ Heat may occur in 4-8 per cent of pregnant cows – insemination at that heat may cause abortion and delayed calving; hence, the need for good records.
  - ▶ Tail paint or whichever heat detection aid is a must routine on every farm and with 3 observations per day (before morning and evening milkings and 9pm) will pick up 90 per cent of in-heat cows.
  - ▶ For tail-paint to work well/easy-to-interpret it must only be 2 inches wide by 9 inches long from the tail head forward to highest point on back bone – all loose hair must be removed first.
  - ▶ Ensure cows are on an adequate plain of nutrition prior and during the breeding season.
- ▶ The non-return rate (NRR) should be 70 per cent or better; that means that in a 100-cow herd that 30 cows should have been submitted each week and only 9 cows repeating in week four. What is wrong if more repeating?
  - ▶ BCS was either too fat at calving or lost too much weight up to mating start date (MSD)- so energy intake could have been reduced,
  - ▶ Service day management:
    - » Poor storage of AI straws,
    - » Poor AI technician technique,
    - » Cows under stress on day due to feed or water shortage,
    - » Poor facilities for service; the ordinary cattle crush is not suitable for AI service.
    - » The best time to serve a cow is 12-24 hours after the onset of heat.
    - » The repeat window is 18-24 days.

- » If there is blood on the vulva, she is gone off heat and there is only a 7 per cent chance she will go in-calf if you serve her. Use that information to “pick” her up in 21 days time or PG her in 7 days’ time to bring her on sooner.
- ▶ Minerals could be a problem (usually 4-5th in line of causes), particularly, Se, I, Cu, Co, and maybe P, Mn, or Mg.
- ▶ Non detected oestrous (NDO) should not be greater than 10%. That means that all cows bar 10 per cent should be mated in the first 3-weeks. Lower suggests you are not actively ‘picking up cows’ that are on-heat.
- ▶ 18-24 Day return interval; This must be over 70%, otherwise something wrong with your heat detection.
- ▶ Target less than 10 per cent (1 to 18 days) short repeat intervals. A high % repeat interval of less than 18 days suggests poor heat detection and that cows are being submitted who are not in heat.
- ▶ Target less than 25 per cent long repeat intervals (24+ days): A lot of intervals greater than 24 days suggests ‘over cautious’ heat detection and failure to AI cows that are on heat; but there could be embryo loss.
- ▶ Remember a missed heat will cost you €150 on your next year’s profit. Many farmers are having 10+ missed heats per 100 cows. Good heat detection is the way to avoid that loss.
- ▶ Because nearly half the cows in the country are by stock bulls I suggest

- that farmers with a low EBI herd should use all Beef AI and buy in good calves next spring or better still do a contract NOW with someone for them next spring.
- ▶ Could I strongly recommend to you that you PLAN to get by this year without a stock bull because?
  - ▶ They are dangerous around the place,
  - ▶ They can move from being fertile to being infertile quite frequently; thereby giving you too many April calvers.
  - ▶ They cost on average €800 – 1000 per year to get approximately 30 -40 cows in calf very expensive!
- ▶ If you have a vasectomised bull, one per 20- 30 cows, let him into the herd 5-6 weeks after start of mating date. Do it before that and he will be wrecked.



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### DO “WHY WAIT” & SCAN AT 32 DAYS

- ▶ This programme involves bringing cows that are due to be mated on week 2 of the breeding season to week 1 and bringing cows due to be mated in week 3 of the breeding season to week 2. How?
- ▶ If you have been recording, and you should have been, pre mating start day (MSD) heats, then you will know: (1) the cows that came in heat from day minus 7 to day minus 14 and, (2) those that came during the period minus 1 to minus 7 days pre-MSD.
  - ▶ Group (1) cows should be PG’d on MSD
  - ▶ Group (2) cows should be PG’d seven days after MSD.
- ▶ Farmers are reluctant to use beef bulls because of longer gestation lengths,
  - ▶ A big loss of MS/cow and the possibility of the cow being culled next year because of late calving,
  - ▶ The “why wait”, if used will be bringing cows into heat 11 days early and so will mitigate against longer gestation.
  - ▶ As well as this approach use beefy, low performing Friesians with very short gestations and easy calving stats.
- ▶ On the week cows are served put a

# 2021 Basic Payment Scheme and Straw Incorporation Measure

Applications for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the submission for the Transfer of Entitlements and the Straw Incorporation Measure (SIM) must be made online via [agfood.ie](https://agfood.ie).

The Straw Incorporation Measure is a payment for chopping straw and incorporating it into the soil.

**The closing date for submission of BPS, Transfer of Entitlements and SIM applications is Monday, May 17.**

The Department's offices are closed to the public for the present.

Farmers, advisors and consultants can call our helpline at:  
Direct Payments Helpdesk – Lo-call 0761 064420.

For more information, visit [gov.ie/agriculture](https://gov.ie/agriculture).

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different colour paint on all cows served that week.

- ▶ This allows you scan cows 39, 46 and 51 days after MSD for the cows served in each of the first 3 weeks of breeding.
  - ▶ The benefits of this early scan are enormous;
    - » More accurate prediction of data of calving,
    - » Cows that are not in calf can be managed under Vet advice.
    - » False pregnancies are identified,
    - » Weak pregnancies are identified.
    - » With this information planning and remedial action can be undertaken.
  - ▶ A very good scanner is worth his weight in gold to you for

this task.

- ▶ At a recent virtual farm walk, a farmer who did both the “why wait” and the early scan last year said... “It is a no brainer decision!

### MANAGE THE GRASS WEDGE!

- ▶ The grass wedge drives summer grazing management and I think many farmers who are measuring are not making decisions to save on meal feeding while at same time maximising milk solids (MS) and grass utilised per hectare. This statement is meant challenge you – “If the cap fits, wear it”.
- ▶ Quality grass is grass that is consistently over 80 per cent DMD and is necessary to maximise MS.
- ▶ The quality of grazed grass is totally dependent on grazing grass that is the correct pre grazing

cover (PGC) for each individual farmer’s grazing stocking rate.

- ▶ Post grazing height, 3.5 – 4.0cms, is another key driver of:
  - ▶ Grass quality for next grazing and subsequent summer grazing,
  - ▶ The amount of grass utilised per hectare,
    - » Because every 1 cm of grass remaining on a field when cows leave the paddock is 200 kgs/ha of grass DM.
    - » If you leave that after you for each of the six (6) summer grazing’s you have LOST 1.2 tons of dry matter per hectare,
    - » Why? Because there none of this left-over grass is available for the next grazing
  - ▶ Tiller density; hence, ground cover to prevent poaching,
- ▶ In my opinion, most farmers ‘give’ cows too many grazing hectares to their cows during late-April to mid-June:
  - ▶ The target MUST be 4.5 – 4.7 cows per hectare,
  - ▶ I shouldn’t need to spell out the consequence for you, but I will:
    - » Low stocking rates means lower quality grass, means more meals to produce expected MS yields.
    - » Less grass grown,
    - » More topping or bailing.
- ▶ The following calculation drives your PGC:
  - ▶ For a stocking rate (SR) of 4.5 cows/Ha, with an allowance of 18kgs DM/cow/day and a 21-day rotation and a residual of 50kg DM this is how you calculate PGC.
  - ▶ **SR x Allowance x Rotation + Residual = 4.5 x 18 x 21 + 50 = 1,750 kg DM/Ha.**
  - ▶ Insert your own planned SR, intake per cow (18kgs required by a reasonably sized cow to produce 2kgsMS/day), rotation length and residuals.
- ▶ Before making decisions to bale, put in more meal etc you must also watch your average farm covers (AFC). The target figure is 150 – 200 kg DM/cow. For example, at a stocking rate of 4.5 cows/Ha, the

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target AFC, with good grazing management, would be:

**Stocking Rate x 170 = 4.5 x 170 = 765 kg DM/Ha.**

- ▶ If your PGC is greater than 1750 and your AFC is greater than 800 then is very likely you will need to cut out 1-2 paddocks immediately for silage.
- ▶ If both figures are under these targets, then you will either have to feed some meal for a short period or graze some silage ground.

### 64% OF NITROGEN USED BY 31 MAY

- ▶ Know how much Nitrogen you are allowed use and then spread accordingly throughout the year.
- ▶ You won't grow enough grass if you don't have 64 per cent on your year's nitrogen allowance used by the end of May and 76 per cent used by mid June,

For most highly stocked farms where they are allowed to use 226units/acre they should have 144 units applied by mid May and 172 before mid June.

- ▶ This is the month to use Nitrogen.
  - ▶ Growth rates and responses are best - 1kgN will grow 30 kg DM grass,
  - ▶ Will enable you get most of your winter feed in the 1st cut - cheapest by far.
- ▶ You must use Nitrogen appropriate for your stocking rate,
  - ▶ If you use too much you will have none left for the remainder of the year and be in trouble with the Nitrate Directive.
- ▶ Spread Nitrogen 3-4 times per week, never at weekends, by spreading N on ungrazed paddocks 3 days before cows are due to graze them.
  - ▶ Be careful that large quantities on N are not spilled on the ground on headlands as cows will be poisoned.
- ▶ On light soils deficient in Sulphur, you will grow more grass (10-50 per cent based on Research).
  - ▶ With no restriction in Sulphur use, you must use 20-25 units of
  - ▶ Sulphur from now to the end of season.
  - ▶ If using Sulphur on copper deficient or molybdenum antagonised deficiency, make sure to give animals a copper bolus.
  - ▶ Don't use sulphur if your farm doesn't respond to it.

### GRAZING TIPS

- ▶ Practice 24, 36 or 48-hour grazing areas for cows (forget about strip grazing or 12-hour blocks). This results in cows having too small an area from which to get their feed.
  - ▶ This results in the 'bully' cows chastising the timid cows with the result the latter have to stop grazing and move away, thus reducing their grazing time. Heifers and shy feeders suffer/stressed due to this bullying.
  - ▶ High performing cows also suffer because they have to eat more grass to produce the extra milk.
    - » These cows will be grazing late in the afternoon while other lower yielding cows will be lying down (observe this yourself).



## Unlocking Silage Potential

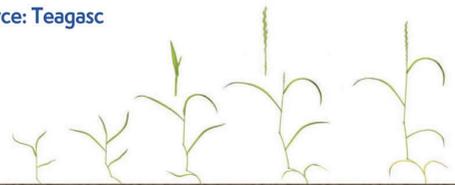
Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

**Silage harvesting is a major cost on Irish farms, therefore it is most important that the desired level of quality is achieved.**

Dry matter digestibility (DMD) is the key factor influencing silage feed value and animal performance. The higher the DMD of a grass silage, the more efficiently animals will use it, leading to greater milk or meat production. To make high DMD silage, the grass sward must contain a high leaf: stem ratio. DMD is also linked to harvest date, with research showing that a crop harvested on June 2nd versus a harvest date of May 20th resulted in a DMD drop of as much as 5%.

### Growth stage at harvest and DMD relationship

Source: Teagasc



>75%

70-75%

60-70%

<65%

Weather will be the main dictating factor with harvesting, however, ensure grass is cut before the seed heading stage and sugar levels are above 3% to achieve best results. Avoid over wilting your crop; if silage is too dry going into the pit, it increases the risk of aerobic spoilage and encourages secondary fermentation once the face is exposed over the winter (heating pit-face). Target 25% dry matter for pit silage and 30/35% dry matter for baled silage.

Silage is best made when enough time has passed since fertiliser was applied and the nitrate levels in the grass are low (<800ppm). Nitrogen (N) levels in grass should be tested if nitrates are a concern pre-mowing. Wilting to a dry matter >28% will help overcome the effects of high N.

### Using a silage additive

The inclusion of a proven silage additive will significantly help improve the process of fermentation and secure as much quality as possible. Using a high-quality additive, like Agritech's GrasZyme Sugarboost, has proven to reduce silage waste, increase silage feed-out quality, and subsequently increase animal performance in the form of increased intakes and production (e.g. increased milk protein, milk volume or average daily gain).

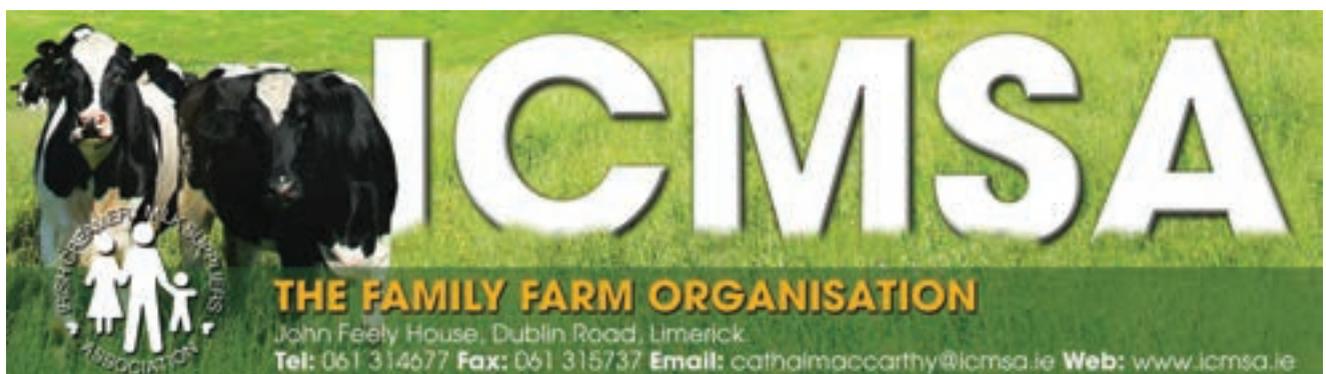
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- » Unfortunately, for the high yielding cows who are grazing late in the afternoon, grass cover will be low. Consequently, bite size is small and, intake is reduced by 1-2 Kgs DM, as well as the DMD will be 1-2% lower due to more stem – the result; lower milk yields and loss of weight.
  - ▶ Post grazing heights must be measured, using a plate meter, so as to be sure you are grazing down to 3-5 to 4 cms.
    - ▶ If, after any grazing, there is grass remaining in paddock (1cm = 200kgsDM/ha), cows should be “asked” to go back out and “clean it out”.
    - ▶ This is best done by letting cows straight out of the parlour; bullies and dominant cows will be first and will have it cleaned by the time the shy feeders arrive. After 1-2 hours they should be moved to the “new paddock”
  - ▶ Cows should enter a fresh paddock in the evening (not after mornings milking) because the grass will have a lot higher sugars – could result in 1-2 litres more milk.
  - ▶ Topping must be carried out when the ‘tall grass’ areas greater than 25 per cent of the paddock area; but if this is happening frequently it means you are under-grazing paddocks. If the tall grass area is 25 per cent in May, it will be 35 per cent to 40 per cent of the paddock in June/July because of the fresh dung deposited during this grazing. Tall grass is grass around dung pads and other under grazed areas. It will be getting nitrogen and the grass not eaten – imagine the financial loss from this.
  - ▶ New Zealand experimental work has shown that topping is preferable to pre-mowing.
- BITS AND PIECES**
- ▶ If you need to know the potential of your cows’ milk yield for this year, multiply your May peak per cow per day by 220.
    - ▶ Example, if a cow peaks at 25litres/day in May, then her expected yield per cow per year will be 5500litres/year
    - ▶ Or if you sell 2.0 kgs MS/cow/day, multiply by 250 and you will know you will sell 500 kg MS/cow this year.
    - ▶ Unfortunately most farmers are not achieving these multiplication factors so use your own based on last year.
  - ▶ Cut 1st cut silage in two lots:
    - ▶ Fields closed 6 – 8 weeks should be cut late May.
    - ▶ Late closed (light covers) fields should be cut 10-15 June.
    - ▶ This procedure should ensure an even arrival of aftergrass and less chance of shortages in June -July.
    - ▶ To maximise the area cut for 1st cut silage and minimise the amount of surplus round bales off milking platform you must stock the cows at 4.5 cows/ha on the grazing area during this period.
  - ▶ The following ‘labour saving’ suggestions may help to make your life easier:
    - ▶ Milk every 16:8 or near it instead of 12:12 milking intervals as there is no loss of milk, and this enables you finish at 6.00 to 6.30pm.
    - ▶ If really working long hours and always ‘coming from behind’, then you should use contractors for fertiliser spreading, spreading slurry, cutting silage, fencing, and milking (FRS) cows occasionally,
  - ▶ Postpone weaning late calves off milk substitute until the calf is at least 110 kgs. weight
    - ▶ Strong calves can now be weaned off meal.
  - ▶ Animal health preventative care:
    - ▶ Treat calves for black leg, hoose (be on lookout for 1st calf coughing) and stomach worms at little later.
    - ▶ Young cows with low immunity may need a hoose/ worm dose,
    - ▶ If Iodine or copper are an issue on your farm consider a suitable bolus now,
    - ▶ It is still vital to take care to prevent grass tetany,
    - ▶ Lameness is a debilitating problem, affecting milk yield, fertility and body condition – if widespread in your herd examine the possible causes, get veterinary help and treat accordingly, possibly keeping in a paddock near the yard,
    - ▶ BCS cows now again in mid-month so that fertility or milk yield are not adversely affected.
    - ▶ Stay on top of mastitis issues by constantly monitoring SCC and occasionally doing a CMT test if not milk recording. It is not to late to start milk recording – essential information you will need when restricted antibiotic use comes into play.

*“Your health is your wealth and you are the only person with responsibility to mind it”*



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