Grass10 Weekly Update

10th July 2018

Current Pasture Performance PastureBase Ireland: www.pbi.ie Micheal O'Leary.

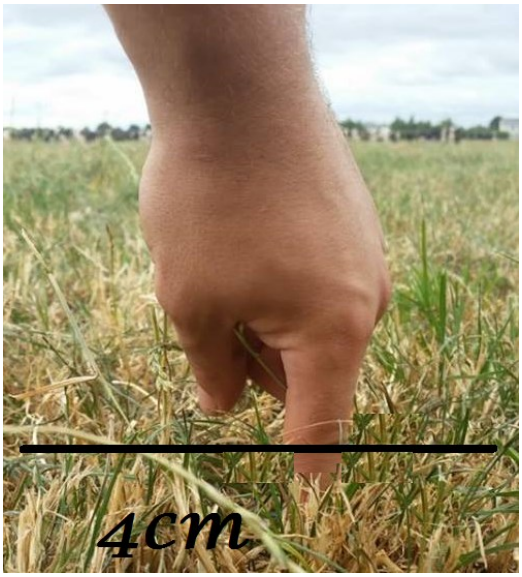
	Farm Cover (kg DM/ha)	Cover/LU (kg DM/LU)	Stocking Rate (LU/ha)	Growth (kg DM/ha)	Demand (kg DM/ha
Average	513	157	3.28	29	32

Drought Message:

- It is crucial to continue to measure grass in this period of low growth. Grass is the primary source of feed on our farms. It is important to quantify how much you have in order to maximise utilisation. There is a danger that farmers will underestimate cover in these weather conditions.
- Supplementation should be secondary to utilising grass that is available on our farms.
- See below for dry matter content of grass samples taken in Moorepark last week (2nd-6th July):

	DM%
Average	28.4%
Min.	23.6%
Max.	33.5%

- Hold rotation length at 25-30 days to maintain a level of grass in the diet during this difficult period of drought. It is crucial that grass supply on farms is "stretched " to keep grass in the diet of the animal.
- Every farm should be meeting residuals of 4cm (use your knuckle as a rule of thumb!). Meeting residuals is critical in maximising utilisation. Avoid topping as its wasting feed available to livestock and will also inhibit regrowth on these paddocks.
- Any cows that are not being kept for next year should be targeted for culling. Any underperforming cows should also be targeted for culling. Scan early this year and empty cows should be culled to reduce demand.
- Farmers can reduce demand by grazing second cut silage ground. Grazing this ground with a strip wire and back fence can extend the rotation and supplement the feed deficit. Make sure to utilise all grass available on ground being grazed, including silage ground.



- Carry out a fodder budget for next winter. If you are short on silage, you may have to supplement alternative feeds to stretch your silage reserves. Be proactive.

Nitrogen Message:

Heavy soils still growing grass	Farms suffering from drought
Nitrogen should still be spread on farms that are still growing grass to maximise growth rates.	Where growth has stopped and where fertiliser has been applied with no breakdown, nitrogen spreading should cease.
Any fertiliser being spread should include sulphur.	If a proportion of the farm is still growing grass, Nitrogen + S should be spread on these paddocks.
	If some paddocks are growing grass, spread N + S on paddocks ahead of livestock on covers of >700kgDM/ha.

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Supplementation Strategy:

- When farmers are formulating diets in this period, it is hugely important to note that a cows overall diet should contain a protein concentration of 16%.
- A dairy farmer should feed concentrates first up to 6kg/head/day.
- Surplus bales were cut on many farms in May and early June to maximise utilisation in a high growth rate period. These bales are high quality (many 75DMD+). The purpose of these surplus bales is to supplement them in extreme weather conditions such as the current drought conditions.
- Many farms are using the following strategy to reduce demand:

	A Sample Diet to Feed a Dairy Cow in Drought Period		
Kg DM	6kg Concentrates	5kgDM Silage	5kgDM Grass
Rule of Thumb (%)	1/3 (33%)	1/3 (33%)	1/3 (33%)

- If farmers are feeding a proportion of the diet as silage, this should be quantified and measured. It is important to be strategic in feeding silage, so that grass utilisation is not compromised. Ad-lib silage feeding will reduce grass utilisation on farms and reduce milk solids being produced.
- If silage reserves are very low on a farm, a feed like palm kernel, soya hulls, or a 3 way mix can also aid in supplementing the feed deficit. It is important to keep enough energy and protein in the diet when formulating mixes, while also having enough fibre to avoid acidosis. At least 50% of the diet must be grass and/or silage to avoid overfeeding concentrates.
- Ensure that all livestock have enough water. If water flow is slow out in paddocks, hold cows following milking if water supply is stronger in the yard. Cows will drink 120l+ in this weather.

Spreading Water/ Irrigation?

- Irrigation and spreading water is a common question being asked by farmers.
- With soil moisture deficits being so high, irrigation will not be sufficient to have an impact on growth and is a very expensive practice.
- 27,000 gallons water/acre: 1 inch of rain/acre.
- Soil moisture deficit is currently 3-4 inches of water around the country.

Key Drought Messages for Future Plant Growth:

- Avoid short rotations (target 25-30 day rotations).
- In a drought, spring tillers die and the remaining tillers are stressed. The period following drought is critical to allow autumn tillering to occur, otherwise pastures will thin out over autumn, production will be poor, and weeds will invade.
- Plants that are still alive but growing slowly due to lack of moisture can quickly recover, green up, and be back into production.
- Dormant plants where above-ground parts have died back, but buds at ground level are surviving, can begin tillering from these buds when rain falls. New green shoots can be seen in the base of dead pasture within 1-2 weeks after rainfall, but recovery in terms of pasture growth rates will still be some weeks away.
- Grass that that looks dead now (although of reasonable quality) will be lost to decay once the rain returns; therefore needs to be utilised now.