

6 tips to deal with current conditions

1. Grazing

- Walk your farm – start getting some cattle out – small numbers in larger areas.
- Do not force cattle to graze out, move on once they start to damage.
- Use temporary fence to protect regrowth.
- Start on the lightest covers – you get through area & start growth process - train in/settle the cattle – less grass to walk in.
- Then move into heavier covers when ground condition are better, you will get better graze outs and this will slow your move through paddocks.
- Keep grazing ground until the first two paddocks have enough grass on them to graze again
- Bale and wrap what is left.

2. Fertiliser

- Order fertiliser and have it ready for when fields are travelable.
- Many farmers have not been able to spread fertiliser so far.
- Spread 30 units Nitrogen per acre:
 - If you have the allowance use 1.5 bags of 18-6-12 +S. The P, K & S will boost growth and help the roots if there is any damage.
 - If you don't have an allowance for P - protected urea is the safest form of nitrogen and you can cover more ground with a spinner full. This will be 0.6 bag 46% or 0.8 bag 38% pro urea.
- Cover all ground, even heavier covers as this will help recovery once grazed, if you are unable to graze them before the first paddock grazed reaches grazing height you can take the paddock out for silage, it will be okay for nitrate at 30 units N per acre. The one caveat here would be areas you cannot cut for silage – try graze them earlier, if this is not possible, maybe you should wait until grazed before applying fertiliser (preference is to graze early).
- Follow the first application with 20 units of nitrogen per acre, three weeks after the first. You cannot grow enough grass this year. Be prepared to take out paddocks.
- Don't forget about grass tetany and have magnesium buckets out for cows.

3. Silage

The cupboard is bare or very low on most farms, it's critical to get silage early. See four possible scenarios below:

A. You didn't graze and have no slurry or fertiliser out and there is a good cover.

It is too late for slurry, this can be applied after the first cut for the second cut

Apply 50 – 60 units of Nitrogen and cut in the first half of May, there is a butt in this silage so you do not want to leave 'til late May. You could add some P&K with a compound like 3 bags of 18-6-12+Sulphur or 2 bags of 27- 2.5 -5 +Sulphur or use 1.5 bags of Pro urea with Sulphur.

B. You didn't graze, there is a good cover, you have slurry out.

Apply 50 – 60 units of Nitrogen in the form of pro urea. Again cut in early May to get better quality.

C. You have grazed, there is no fertiliser or slurry out.

There is no real cover, so this is still an option for slurry – **but go with the chemical first, it will boost growth faster**, 1.5 bags of pro urea plus sulphur (38% N + 7% S) follow a week to 10 days later with 2,500-3,000 gallons per acre using a low emission slurry spreader. **Do not wait to get slurry on first**, the chemical N will work faster. You need a week. between applications.

Alternatively go with a compound like 3 bags of 13-6-20 and followed by a bag of 38% pro urea with S – try get 15 units per acre of Sulphur on. Then apply slurry for the second cut.

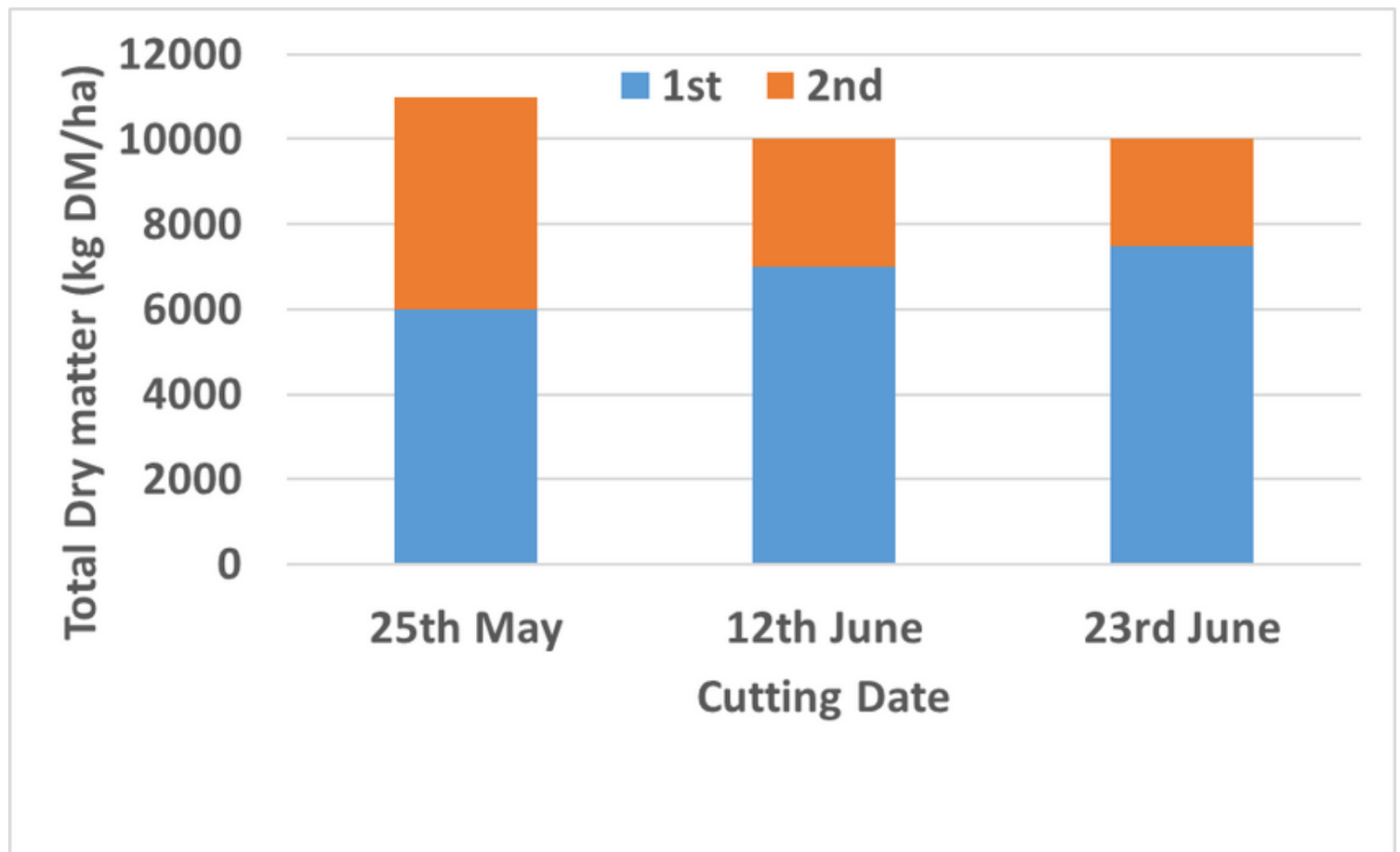
D. You have grazed, there is 2,500 gallons per acre of slurry out.

Depending on time of application and quality of slurry etc. you will have to take a stab at what N is left. If we say there is 12 -15 units – then top up to 80 units with chemical N e.g. 1.75 to two bags of pro urea. Go on the higher side if you have good reseeds. Cut 25th May.

Should I bulk up silage in the first cut?

After the long winter you want to build reserves and the natural thought is to “bulk up” the first cut, however Teagasc research shows that this is a false economy, you are better to take two cuts, starting early to get higher total yield and better quality. See table one where an extra tonne /ha of Dm was achieve through a two cut system, that is the equivalent of 4.5 bales of silage. The quality of the silage will also be far superior with silage cut in early June struggling to be 65DMD silage and even worse if not already grazed.

The two cut system also gives you more options, especially if we experience drought conditions, you have silage cut in mid-May and grass growing back to be used if needs be. If it's left until June, you may have no grazing and grass burning back.



Total dry matter per year based on dates of silage harvest

4. Do a Fodder Budget

See sample fodder budget below

There is an excellent ready reckoner on [Pasture Base Ireland](#)

Fodder Required				
	A	B	C	D
Animal Type	No. stock for winter	No.months (Including a 4-6 week reserve)	No. bales required per month (at 25% DM)	Total bales of silage needed (AxBxC)
Suckler cows			1.7	
0-1 yr old			0.9	
1-2 yr old			1.35	
2+ yr old			1.7	
Dry ewes			0.15	
Total bales needed				_____ bales
Total tonnes needed (bales divided by 1.25)				_____ tonnes

- Estimate what you require
- After first cut, see where you are
- Can you reduce demand?
 - Sell unproductive cows
 - Finish cattle off grass or earlier on concentrate
 - Sell stock as stores rather than carry them over the winter – this can be decided in September
- Buy in silage
- Replace silage with concentrate – very dependent on cost

[Relative values of Feeds for Low Protein Diet Calculator](#)

	50% of forage available		75% of forage available	
	Silage Allowance (kg)	Meal Needed (kg)	Silage allowance (kg)	Meal needed (kg)
Dry dairy cow	25	3-4	38	2-3
Dry suckler (good condition)	20	2.5-3.0	30	0.5-1.0*
Suckler cow with calf	20	5-6	30	3-4
Store (500 kg) / Incalf heifer	20	3-4	30	2-3
Weanling	12	2-4	20	2-3

* Thin cows may require additional meals

	Cost €/t Fresh weight	Cost €/t Dry Matter	UFL	CP	Comment
Barley	270	312	1.16	113	
Distillers	320	359	1.13	299	
Beet pulp	248	281	1.14	100	High fibre energy – excellent fodder stretcher
Soya hulls	245	279	1.05	107	Excellent fibre source – moderate energy
Maize Gluten	263	304	0.98	235	Good fibre levels (Max feeding rate 8-10 kg FW)
Silage 72 DMD	42	208	0.8	73	Assuming 20% dry matter
Silage 68 DMD	39	191	0.76	66	Assuming 20% dry matter
Maize Silage	65	202	0.8	68	Assuming 30% starch & 30% dry matter
Grass 82 DMD	297	49	1	111	Spring grass ~1500 kg DM at 16.1% dry matter

If silage is costing above €30/bale (750kg), may be better to feed a concentrate or straight. Remember when restricting silage you need to have extra feed space so all animals can feed at the same time.

Fodder Register and Helplines

There is silage in the country, a [Fodder Register](#) is in place to help connect farmers who have fodder available with those farmers that require it. Farmers can contact the local Teagasc Advisory office to register as having feed available, or to enquire if there are farmers on the register from whom they might source feed.



Contact The Teagasc National Grassland Helpline: 059 918 3155

5. Health issues in calves due to still being housed

Electrolytes – Not all the same

- Scouring calves get high level of acid in stomach and blood (acidosis) – leaving them lethargic
- Good ingredients to combat this are: Sodium bicarbonate, propionate, citrate or acetate
- Propionate/citrate/acetate are better than sodium bicarbonate for suckler calves because they do not interfere with milk digestion
- Energy sources sodium, potassium and chloride
- Read the label
- If slight scour 2 x 2L feeds/day, as severity increases, so should the number of feeds
- If a lot of scour 3- 4 x 2L feeds/day
- Act early

General advice

- Keep feeding Milk
- Try not to stomach tube milk, especially in older calves as the rumen is developing, the milk can go into wrong stomach and sicken the calf, its better from them to suckle
- Give a drip earlier vs. later for best results
- Anti-inflammatories will give a slightly better appetite
- Avoid oral antibiotics as these affect the bugs in the stomach and therefore delay recovery, talk to your vet for best options
- Probiotics can be included in treatments but will not be sufficient by themselves
- Stay away from things you can mix in with milk
- Clean sheds well when possible & give max. time to dry out over summer

Test the calf's scour for more effective treatment

Crypto

Halocur can reduce burden

Give once a day for first 7 days on a full stomach

Coccidiosis

Toltrazuril and Diclazuril products treat coccidiosis, they are similar but not the same, neither have a residual effect after dosing – talk to your vet about an effective treatment programme

6. Breeding Season 2024

Cows are housed for a long period and are possibly on poorer quality silage now, body condition is key to getting cows back cycling.

- If your cows are still in, start to feed 2 Kgs of meal to ensure they are not losing condition
- Get to grass as soon as possible
- Turn first calvers, old cows and thinner cows out first
- Breaking the bond with the calf can help cows start to cycle, many call this restricted suckling. If still housed, is there a way to allow the calves out to grass? Once out grazing, can you forward creep graze the calves from day one using horse pole stakes or gates,
- If later into the breeding season and cows are slow to come bulling Is synchronisation an option?

For further advice, talk to your advisor

[A full list of Teagasc offices is available here](#)