

Grass10 campaign - improving sustainability of our grass based systems

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Summary

- The Grass 10 campaign promotes sustainable grassland excellence.
- The objective of the campaign is to achieve 10 grazings/paddock per year utilising 10 ton of pasture dry matter/ha.
- There is a huge requirement to focus on educating the industry in the establishment and management of grass/clover swards.

Introduction

The requirement for resilient sustainable systems of milk and meat production has never been as high. There is continual change in global agriculture due to fluctuation in markets, agricultural policy, societal expectations and environmental constraints. As a result there will be further requirement to increase efficiency and sustainability in Irish pasture-based systems.

Grass10 Campaign

The Grass10 campaign aims to promote sustainable grassland excellence on Irish livestock farms (dairy, beef and sheep). The Grass10 partners are Grassland Agro, AIB, FBD, Department Agriculture Food & the Marine and the Irish Farmers Journal. The primary objective of the Grass10 Campaign is to utilise 10 tonnes of pasture dry matter (DM)/ha per year by achieving 10 grazings per paddock on grassland farms. The following farm practice changes were prioritised:

- Improving grazing infrastructure.
- Soil fertility — improve soil pH, P and K levels.
- Increase the level of reseeding.
- Improving the level of clover in pastures.
- PastureBase Ireland (PBI) usage.
- Improving grassland management skills.

Given the success of the Grass10 campaign over the last six years it is critical to maintain this momentum. The Grass10 campaign will continue to focus on increasing grass growth and utilisation of home grown feed on Irish grassland farms. The main focus of the campaign is to ensure the long term sustainability of Irish pasture-based dairy, beef and sheep production systems.

Improving the level of grass measurement and management

Currently, there are over 50 Grass10 grazing courses operating across the country and this model of improving the level of grassland management and measurement locally has worked well. This is fundamental work carried out during the Grass10 campaign and the plan is to further develop this knowledge transfer model to increase farm level adoption of grassland measurement and management using PastureBase Ireland (www.pbi.ie). Every extra day the animal spends at grass reduces greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions. Emissions are reduced by animals feeding themselves and spreading their own manure but also because the animal is eating a superior diet.

Clover

There is now an increasing demand to include white clover in grazed pastures due to its ability to biologically fix nitrogen making it available for grass growth and thereby potentially reducing inorganic nitrogen fertiliser use, while maintaining or increasing pasture production and quality and improving animal performance. There are challenges in establishing clover in swards at farm level. These issues revolve around time of sowing, soil fertility, herbicide choice and grazing management. There is a huge requirement to focus on educating the grassland industry in the establishment and management of grass/clover swards. Some of the key developments planned in the Grass10 campaign will be:

- Establishing clover pilot farms nationwide in conjunction with the Clover 150 Programme, across enterprises, building a knowledge transfer programme around these farms
- Hosting clover workshops on farm and in Teagasc Research farms
- Publication of a Clover Management Guide - weekly clover updates in the Grass10 Newsletter

Nutrient management

Grass requires a continuous and balanced soil nutrient supply to achieve its production potential. Many farms are capable of growing in excess of 13 tons DM/ha annually. This level of grass production requires reasonable quantities of nutrients such as nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), potassium (K) and sulphur (S) supplied at the correct time. The return in grass production from correcting soil fertility is very high. Improving nutrient use efficiency has become a priority due to the ambitious targets to reduce fertiliser use outlined in the EU Farm to Fork Strategy (2030). PastureBase Ireland can facilitate the process of improving nutrient use efficiency, by providing farmers with up-to-date information on fertiliser use, level of fertiliser requirements and soil fertility. Improving nitrogen use efficiency, along with technologies such as protected urea, LESS, GPS, etc. will assist Ireland to achieve its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture. To promote the concept of better nutrient management and nitrogen use efficiency, the profiles of farmers who excel in this area will be disseminated through the Grass10 weekly newsletter (www.teagasc.ie/crops/grassland/grass10) and social media platforms in the programme.