

# Increasing the usage of PastureBase Ireland on dairy farms

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## Summary

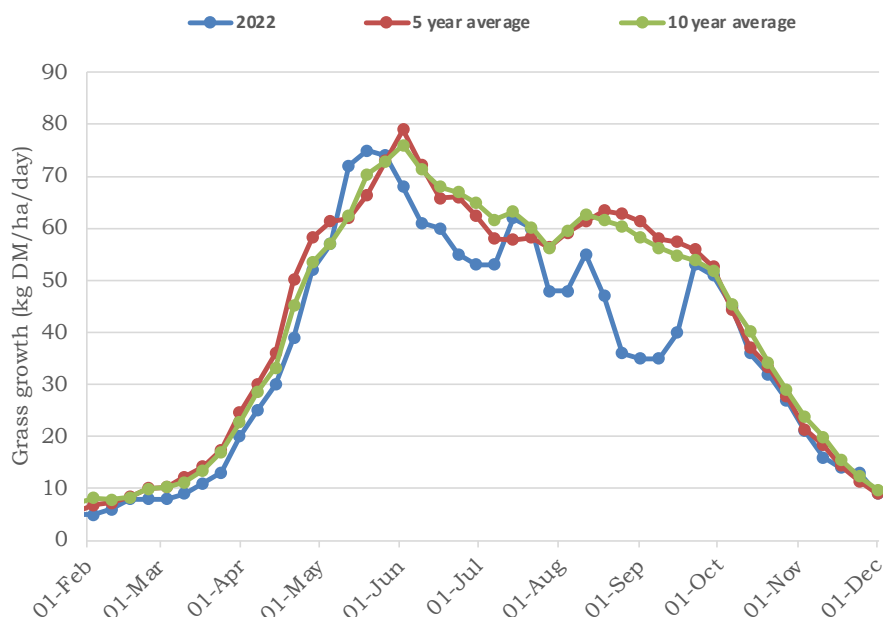
- PastureBase Ireland (PBI) now has over 6,200 users of which 93% are dairy farmers.
- Over 2,000 dairy farms completed 20 farm covers or more in 2022.
- Dairy farmers recording farm cover regularly on PBI have grown between 11.1 and 14.4 t dry matter/ha per year over the last eight years.
- Farmers are encouraged to download the 'PBI Grass' app which now has increased functionality.
- A number of new applications for fertiliser and clover management are now available on PBI.

## Introduction

PastureBase Ireland (PBI) has a range of grassland decision support tools available to farmers to assist in short, medium and long-term farm management decisions. Clover has an ever widening role to play on dairy farms and a number of new initiatives have been developed within PBI to cater for this requirement. A range of new tools and reports have been developed in recent years and PBI continues to expand its functionality to meet the demands of grassland farmers. Each year, both the number of farmers using the application and the measuring intensity of these farmers continues to increase. In 2022, over 90,000 grass covers were recorded in PBI, an increase of 12,000 grass covers on the previous year. The number of covers entered on a weekly basis over the summer months peaked at 3,000 grass covers per week. There has been a clear, continual increase in grassland measurement on dairy farms over time, which has been assisted by the grassland measurement requirement for farmers with a nitrates derogation.

## Grass growth

In the last four years grass growth in Ireland varied by 1.4 t dry matter (DM)/ha where the average annual tonnage recorded on farms was 12.2, 13.0, 12.6 and 13.6 t DM/ha in each of 2022, 2021, 2020 and 2019, respectively; average growth in 2018 was 11.3 t DM/ha although this was an atypical year. In 2022, grass growth was significantly reduced in the months of June, July, August and September mainly due to moisture deficits at different points in the season (see Figure 1). In general grazing and silage events are being maintained between 7.5 and 8 per season, however the level of silage being harvested from the grazing platform is reducing, a consequence of less nitrogen (N) being spread on the grazing area. More farmers are routinely recording the level of N applied on farms, which, over time, will allow a better investigation of grass growth and N usage.



**Figure 1.** Daily grass growth rates for PBI farms throughout 2022 compared to the five and 10 year averages

### Nitrogen management planning

Improving N usage on farms is a major focus to reduce N surplus, however this means that more focussed nutrient management planning is required before spreading. Nitrogen usage should be targeted differently across the farm depending on paddock clover content; a key management aspect of clover is to have a well thought out approach to N application. One of the new aspects of PBI is being able to record fertiliser application easily on the App. The introduction of the 'Nitrogen Planner' tool can assist farmers to plan their N application before the season starts. As the season progresses and data is uploaded on the App, a summary of the Nitrogen plan establishes on the system. The Clover 150 Programme farms have refined their N application significantly with this approach over the last two years.

### Conclusion

PastureBase Ireland is a multi-purpose tool that allows farmers to improve grazing and nutrient management. It is an ever evolving decision support tool and the next planned addition to PBI is to integrate the MoSt grass growth model into the system; this development will allow individual farms to predict their own weekly grass growth.

PastureBase Ireland is freely available to all Irish grassland farmers. If you wish to sign up or require more information please call our dedicated help centre on 046-9200965 or email [support@pbi.ie](mailto:support@pbi.ie).

