

Grazing management for dairy-beef systems

Achieving the desired levels of animal performance at pasture is critical for dairy-beef systems. Target weight gains can be achieved from grass-only diets where the correct management practices are implemented.

Key components of efficient grazing systems:

Infrastructure

- Good grazing infrastructure (roads and paddocks) maximise grass utilisation.
- An inadequate number of paddocks leads to extended residency times, which reduces grass utilisation and DM production.
- Forty-eight hour paddocks offer the greatest flexibility in terms of ensuring animal's intake is not restricted, paddocks are large enough for machinery operations, and paddocks can be split for calves or during difficult grazing conditions.
- 10-12 paddocks necessary for each grazing group.

Grass measurement

- Needs to be done weekly (>20 measures/year)
- Give confidence in making decisions
- Identify when a surplus or deficit in feed supply occurs
- Improve labour efficiency
- Improve sward quality
- Identify underperforming swards

Nutrient management

- Grass growth and growth response to N fertiliser can be constrained on farm if soil fertility is not optimum.
- Dairy-beef farms should soil test regularly to identify any nutrient deficits and to formulate targeted nutrient management plans.
- Investing in correcting soil fertility on farm increases the availability of N in soils and improves the persistence of productive herbage species such as perennial ryegrass and clover.
- To maximise herbage production, the ideal pH is 6.3 for most soils and organic and inorganic manures should be strategically used to maintain and build P and K levels to index 3.



Clover

- Including white clover in grass swards can improve sward nutritive value and animal production, while reducing reliance on chemical N fertiliser due to the ability of clover to “fix” atmospheric N.
- An average annual white clover content of 20-25% increases pasture quality and encourages high levels of DM intake which ultimately leads to greater live weight performance of dairy-beef cattle. To promote and maintain high levels of sward clover content, a pre-grazing herbage mass of 1300-1600 kg DM/ha, and a post-grazing sward height of 4 - 5 cm should be maintained, N fertiliser should also be decreased over the summer months.
- Red clover can also play an important role in efficient dairy-beef systems. The growing point of red clover is more exposed in the sward compared to white clover, making it more suitable as a multi cut silage crop. Red clover has the ability to fix high levels of N annually (200-300 kg N/ha).

Seasonal management

Spring	Mid-season	Autumn
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Spring rotation planner● Finish first rotation by April 1st● AFC: 600-700 kg DM/ha● Target post-grazing sward height: 4 cm● 45 day rotation● Close 45-55% of the farm area for first cut silage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Maintain sward quality● Walk farm weekly● Remove surplus grass as high quality baled silage● 18-21 day rotation● Target pre-grazing herbage mass: 1300-1600 kg DM/ha● Target post-grazing sward height: 4-5 cm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Planning for the following spring begins in the Autumn● Start building cover<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Reduce demand, increase rotation length (+1.5 days/week)● Use the “60:40 Autumn planner”● Target post-grazing sward height: 4 cm● AFC: 450-550 kg DM/ha on December 1st

Do's and don't's of good grazing management

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Graze covers of 1300-1600 kg DM/ha (8-10 cm)✓ Regularly walk the farm✓ Target post grazing height 4-5 cm✓ Offer fresh herbage every 48 hours✓ Follow a 18-21 day rotation length✓ Remove surplus pasture as bales✓ Have a fertiliser strategy✓ Monitor animal performance regularly✓ Have a strategy for closing the farm in the autumn | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Continuously graze heavy covers (<1600 kg DM/ha)✗ Delay turnout in the spring✗ Residency time of >48-72 hours in a paddock✗ Force animals to graze out excessively heavy swards✗ Avoid sticking to routine housing dates, if conditions and grass supply allow, continue grazing✗ Let animal performance decrease due to internal parasite infection |
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