

DAIRY

April 2025

Top five tips for April

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**HERDS
SHOULD BE
OFFERED
18-20kg
DM/day**

of grass from covers
of 1,400kg DM/ha to
maximise grass
quality and DM
intake.



Ensure that cows are receiving large quantities of high-quality grass daily.

1. Invest in reseedling: spending on reseedling over the last number of years has declined (Profit Monitor data 2022-25). A spend of about €45/cow is required to maintain a 10% reseedling rate. In 2024 this figure was at €26/cow or similar to a reseedling rate of 5%. Reseedling done properly gives an excellent return on investment – make it a priority for 2025.

2. Grass intake drives your margin: as your cows hit peak and move closer to the breeding season, ensure that they are receiving large quantities of high-quality grass daily. This will drive profitable milk solids output while maintaining costs. An increase of 1kg DM grass eaten per day over the grazing season can increase profit by €120/cow. Graze at the right quality (three-leaf stage, 1,400kg DM/ha covers) to ensure quality and good utilisation to 4cm.
3. Select the best: as breeding season approaches it is important that you select a good bull team for future herd requirements. We also need to select our best genetic cows to breed replacements from, rather than randomly breeding cows to dairy. Selective breeding is impossible with dairy stock bulls – the advice is to eliminate these from the system and selectively use the best AI bulls available.
4. Heifer weights: if you are hoping to use a synchronisation protocol this season, make sure you have the correct protocol with the proper dosage and product worked out in advance. Remember, the timing and sequence of shots is an exact process – changing or adjusting the timings or products will reduce conception rates. To avoid confusion, write the exact protocol in the diary before starting the season. Also, remember synchronisation may not work as well with underweight heifers.
5. Don't forget sulphur fertiliser: research over many years has shown that there is a good grass growth response where sulphur is included in the fertiliser plan. April is a good time to apply. Sulphur is an important factor for efficient use of nitrogen (N) by the grass plant, so as limits for chemical N reduce, it will become more important to maintain grass growth. Up to 20kg/ha per year may be needed, applied in split applications as part of the farm's N fertiliser plans. Check with your adviser for your own farm circumstances in terms of rates and products.



April is a good time to apply sulphur fertiliser.

Deal with problem cows in good time

April is a critical month in dictating the success of your breeding season. Pre-breeding heat detection is an extra chore but is an integral part of your breeding plan. Tail paint the entire herd in early April to help identify any cows not actively

cycling. Heat detection technologies have become more popular but the herd manager still needs to act on the data generated by these systems! Whatever the system in place, cows calved >42 days and identified as not showing heat should be



Now is the time to prepare for the breeding season.

examined by a vet at least 7-10 days ahead of the breeding season. It is also worth examining any cows with problems recorded at calving – twins, assisted/difficult calvings (score 3 or higher), milk fever, retained placenta, etc. These are at higher risk of uterine infection so the additional check is warranted; your vet can then decide appropriate treatment.

Having as many cows as possible 'fit' for service on breeding start date will drive submission rate, which is a key to achieving high six-week calving rates. It can be tempting to skip pre-breeding and

rely on identifying the problems when they arise during the breeding season. However, in seasonal calving systems, time is of the essence. Conception rates improve with increasing numbers of cycles, so interventions that kickstart the reproductive cycle early increase the number of opportunities that cows have to get back in calf for 2026 within a defined 12-week breeding season.

Finally, have you reviewed your planned start of calving in recent years? Many (if not most) farms start breeding on a given date out of tradition rather than analysis of their current stocking rate, pasture growth and farm infrastructure. With increased stocking rates and herd maturity, spring grass demand is much higher in February than it used to be. Better herd fertility contributes too, but it also offers the opportunity to adjust the start of calving date while still finishing early enough in spring. Would you benefit from starting a week later for example, and adding a week to lactation in the back end of the year? It's worth thinking about.

Safe fertiliser spreading

Check your tractor and machine before spreading fertiliser. Ensure that PTO guards are in place and secure. Lifting equipment for large fertiliser bags must be in good condition. Use long-handled knives to open bags, stay clear, and always lower equipment when it is not in use. Drive carefully at all times, especially in the farmyard. If you must travel on slopes, carefully assess the risk of overturning. Stay vigilant.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Check machinery before spreading fertiliser.

Herd nutrition notes for April

March 2025 was excellent in terms of getting cows to grass and utilising swards. However, allocating sufficient grass in April can be a significant pinch point for maintaining herd performance and body condition when cows are approaching peak milk solids production. Managing the transition to the second grazing rotation, milking platform stocking rate/closing area for silage production and moderate growth rates relative to demand can all impair pre-grazing covers and daily allocations. Herds should be offered 18-20kg DM/day of grass, from covers of 1,400kg DM/ha to maximise grass quality and dry matter intake (DMI). Paddock size, low (<1,200kg DM/ha) or heavy (>1,600kg DM/ha) covers, and/or post-grazing residual can further compromise DMI. Target a residual of 4-4.5cm to maintain intake and subsequent sward quality. On farms that are tight for grass, ideally maintain a consistent, if not increasing supply of grass, to the herd in the coming weeks in preparation for breeding. Cows should have a minimum body condition score (BCS) of 2.75 to increase the likelihood of conception. For individual

animals at 2.5 BCS or below, consider once-a-day milking to reduce energy output and support partitioning of energy to BCS gain. Increased meal feeding will not recover sufficient BCS in the short term. Heifers should be meeting body weight (BW) targets, aiming to be 60% of mature BW for mating start date, and therefore should be within 15-20kg of this target on April 1 and should have access to high-quality pasture in advance and during breeding season, particularly where synchronisation programmes are being employed. Keep good records so that you can act quickly in response to poor performance, whether it is low submission rate, or lower than expected conception rates to first service. If there are signs of pica (licking, eating stones, branches, depraved appetite, etc.), act promptly and blood test approx. 10% of the herd to confirm suspected mineral deficiencies. Address these immediately, but note also that over-supplementing minerals above requirements is costly, will not improve fertility, is harmful for the environment, and certain elements can cause toxicity over time.

Calculating paddock size for 36hr grazing:

$$\frac{(\text{cow no.} \times \text{allocation} \times 1.5)}{\text{pre-grazing cover}} = \text{ha}$$

$$\frac{(120 \text{ cows} \times 20\text{kg DM} \times 1.5)}{1,400\text{kg DM/ha}} = 2.6\text{ha}$$

Can you grow enough grass to meet herd demand?

$$\text{Allocation} \times \text{SR} = \text{demand}$$

$$20\text{kg DM} \times 3\text{LU} = 60\text{kg DM/ha}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &21\text{-}22 \text{ day rotation at growth of } 60\text{kg DM/ha/day} \\ &= 1,400\text{kg DM/ha pre-grazing cover} \end{aligned}$$