



Redefining autumn grazing management targets for pasture-based systems of dairy production

Walsh Scholars Reference Number: 2026014

Research Institution: Teagasc

University: University College Cork (UCC)

Location: Teagasc Moorepark, Fermoy, Co. Cork, Ireland

Funding: Teagasc

Proposed Start Date: September 2026

Project Summary

Ireland's pasture-based dairy systems offer major advantages through low feed costs and a reduced environmental footprint. Sustaining these benefits depends on high levels of pasture utilisation throughout the grazing season. While substantial research has informed spring grazing management, comparatively limited attention has been given to autumn grazing, particularly from August onwards. Given ongoing changes in climate, stocking rates, and farm management practices, there is a need to reassess whether current autumn grazing targets remain appropriate.

Autumn represents a critical period, accounting for approximately 40% of annual herbage production. Current recommendations advise extending grazing rotations from 21 days in summer to 30 days by early September and to 40 days by early October, with average farm cover peaking at approximately 1,100 kg DM/ha in mid-September. However, data from PastureBase Ireland indicate that many farms do not achieve these targets, often due to limited rotation adjustments and challenging weather conditions. Evidence also suggests that lower pre-grazing yields may be associated with improved cow performance, raising questions about the effectiveness of existing targets.

This project will evaluate current autumn grazing guidelines and explore alternative management approaches, including lower peak covers. The aim is to develop evidence-based strategies that enhance pasture utilisation, support animal performance and welfare, and reduce environmental risks under variable autumn conditions.

Supervision

The project will be jointly supervised by Emer Kennedy at Teagasc and Deirdre Hennessy at University College Cork. Dr Kennedy has expertise in grazing management, flexible milking systems, calf rearing, and dairy cow welfare. Dr Hennessy provides academic supervision in animal and grassland science through University College Cork.

Research Environment

You will be registered at University College Cork and based at Teagasc Moorepark, a centre of excellence for pasture-based dairy production research, for the duration of your studies. The project offers access to experimental farm platforms, long-term grazing trials, and a strong interdisciplinary research community.

As a Walsh Scholar, you will benefit from engagement with national and international research networks, regular seminars, and opportunities to collaborate with researchers across grassland science, dairy production, animal nutrition, and environmental sustainability.

Career and Training Opportunities

The Teagasc Walsh Scholars Programme provides a structured four-year training and development framework designed to support both academic excellence and long-term career readiness. Scholars develop advanced scientific and analytical expertise alongside transferable skills in communication, project management, and stakeholder engagement through expert-led training, workshops, and tailored professional development. University College Cork provides a range of postgraduate training modules to support the development of relevant research and transferrable skills.



Opportunities are provided to present research at national and international conferences, supporting professional networking and active engagement with the wider research community. Dedicated final-year career supports focus on preparing Scholars for impactful roles across research, industry, advisory services, and policy, in Ireland and internationally.

Through the Teagasc International Training Awards, scholars may undertake an international research placement of up to 12 weeks aligned with their PhD project. Outstanding achievement may also be recognised through the Walsh Scholars of the Year and Gold Medal Awards, and UCC School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences Publication of the Year.

Candidate Profile and Eligibility

Applicants should ideally:

- Hold a First or 2.1 Honours degree (Level 8) or a Master's degree (Level 9) in agriculture, animal science, zoology, veterinary science, or a related discipline
- Demonstrate experience in field- and/or laboratory-based research, with strong data handling skills
- Show the ability to apply multidisciplinary approaches to hypothesis-driven research
- Possess excellent written and verbal communication skills and the ability to work effectively as part of a team
- Hold a full, clean driving licence valid in Ireland
- Meet UCC postgraduate entry requirements, including English language requirements where applicable

Funding Details

This is a fully funded four-year PhD funded by Teagasc, including:

- €25,000 annual stipend
- University fees covered up to €6,000 per annum

How to Apply

Applicants should complete [the online application form](#) by **4:00pm on Wednesday, 18 March 2026**.

Applications must include a curriculum vitae and a 1–2 page statement of motivation submitted as part of the online application.

Interviews

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview in **early to mid-April 2026**. Online interviews can be accommodated.

Further Information

Informal enquiries are welcome and may be directed to: Dr Emer Kennedy – emer.kennedy@teagasc.ie

Further information on the Walsh Scholars Programme is available at:

<https://www.teagasc.ie/about/research-innovation/the-walsh-scholars-programme/about-the-programme/>