

Messages:

- ▶ **The farming year starts in October.**
- ▶ **Assess BCS of cows and act.**
- ▶ **Carefully manage the last grazing rotation to targets.**
- ▶ **Avoid soil compaction/damage at all cost.**
- ▶ **Reduce your tax bill by planning.**
- ▶ **Be on top of replacement heifer management in October.**
- ▶ **Analyse soil and feed and assess your winter feed requirements.**
- ▶ **Be aware of your responsibilities to habitats and biodiversity.**

By Matt Ryan

The Planning Year starts Now

- ▶ Many of the decisions and actions you take in October have a big influence on how profitable 2020 will be for you. What are the key decisions?
 - ▶ Body condition (BCS) of herd.
 - ▶ When and which cows to dry off in October,
 - ▶ Building and maintaining autumn grass until November,
 - ▶ Investment steps needed to minimise your 2019 tax bill.
 - ▶ Analysis of silage for DMD and mineral levels,
 - ▶ Soil analysis so as no field has a ph of less than 6.3 or below Index 4 for P & K.
 - ▶ Are replacement heifers on target?

Assess Body Condition Score and Act

- ▶ Cows should be BCS six times of the year and this is the FIRST and probably the most important. Why?
 - ▶ If cows calve down thin they will not readily go back in calf and neither will they milk well next year
 - ▶ For every 50 kgs (1 condition score = 40-50kgs) below target, a cow will milk 450 litres of milk less than her potential.
- ▶ If you have thin cows identified in October you have a few management options to rectify it:
 - ▶ Dry off now to allow her have a long dry period to put on weight.
 - ▶ With 120 days to calving for February calvers, no meals will be needed with good silage.
 - ▶ Go on once - a - day milking (OAD) now.
 - ▶ Feed low a low protein ration,
- ▶ If you wait until November to deal with thin cows you have only one option - that is, feed a lot of meals during the dry period which is inefficient and expensive.
- ▶ To get an accurate assessment of BCS put all cows through the cattle crush to handle them in tail head, ribs, short ribs and backbone.
- ▶ If you don't know how to do it (simple - assess body fat on the cow) or need an update, get your Adviser or Discussion Group to show you: There are people out there who do it for a fee.
- ▶ The target BCS at drying off is 3.0 - 3.25. Generally they will calve down in same condition as dried off ,

- ▶ Cows with a BCS of 2.75 or less now, must be 'earmarked' for special attention. As she has a deficit of 0.5 BCS, at least 25 kg below target condition, therefore she will have to be fed an extra 130kg meal (5-6 time the weight required) if meal feeding is the option you choose. This means feeding 2 kgs ration/hd/day for 10 weeks; discount the first two weeks after drying off and the last two weeks before calving. Therefore, she needs 14 weeks dry period.
- ▶ Which cows should be dried off from 15th October on? Cows in BCS less than 2.75,
 - ▶ 1st lactation cow calving in January/February.
 - ▶ Cows milking less than 7- 8 litre or 0.6kgs MS/hd/day.
 - ▶ Cows with SCC's greater than 300,000.
 - ▶ All these cows should either be housed, sold or moved to outside blocks but off the grazing platform to allow all available grass for milking cows.
- ▶ Remember, the only way to improve the body condition of high genetic merit cows, which are thin the whole year, is to give them a long dry period, starting now.

The Last Grazing Rotation

- ▶ The last rotation management is crucial in setting up the farm for next year's grazing:
 - ▶ Grazing very heavy covers and/or leaving too high covers at closing will result in very poor growth until May of next year.
 - ▶ Its management will influence the amount of meal you will feed this side of Christmas and the first half of next year.
- ▶ Every extra kg DM cover left at closing increases grass availability by 12kg DM. in the spring. Therefore, operate closely to the farm covers recommendations in Table1.
- ▶ Every day extra cows graze in autumn delivers €2.20 per cow per day extra profit.
- ▶ As the last rotation will be 45-50 days from start to finish, you must decide on your closing date. If closing is the 20th November, then the last rotation should start on 10th October.
- ▶ Too many farmers are completing the last rotation too early and losing significant profits. This is particularly so for farmers who have wet land and are not committed to wet weather grazing techniques.
- ▶ The last rotation must begin on 1-16th October, earliest (and probably earlier) in wet land. If that doesn't happen you won't have grass next spring. Spring is when you need grass most, as you will be trying to maintain milk yield and increase body condition as cheaply as possible. Therefore, plan your paddock grazing strategy now.
- ▶ The first paddocks to be grazed next spring must be dry, be near the milking parlour and have 1400 - 1600 Kgs DM/ha of grass cover.
- ▶ Therefore, they must be the first paddocks to be grazed on the last rotation. If they haven't enough grass on them, skip other paddocks so as to graze them in early October. Simple exercise but it will save you a lot of hassle next February.
- ▶ You are now on last rotation, to finish on dry land on 20-25 November (2-3 weeks earlier on wet land). Each paddock must be well grazed out to 3.5 - 4.0 cms (if you

leave too much grass it will result in poor pastures next year because of lack of tillering).

- ▶ You must have at least 70 per cent of the grazing block grazed by the 1st November (dry land); otherwise you will be short of grass next February.
- ▶ The following target covers (kgs DM/ha) are suggested for different stocking rates.

Date	2.5 Cows/ha		3.0 Cows/ha		3.5Cows/ha	
	Cover/Cow	AFC	Cover/cow	AFC	Cover/Cow	AFC
1st Oct	400	1000	380	1150	335	1175
15th Oct	350	880	340	1020	285	1000
1st Nov	280	700	275	820	240	830
Closing	550 - 600		600 - 650		700 - 750	

Table 1: Target Covers per cow and Total farm cover (AFC)

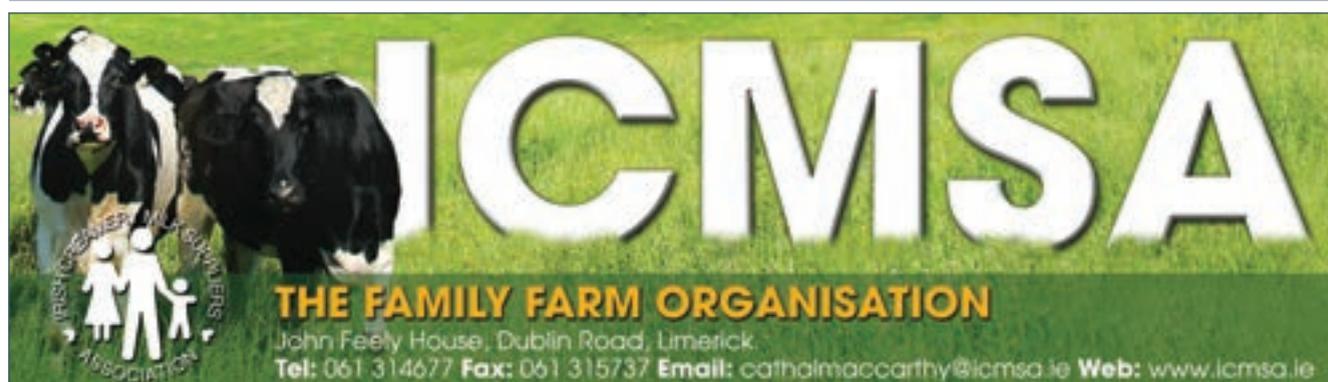
- ▶ If you don't hit these covers in early October, then you will have to house earlier than 20th November and the allocated area will not have near enough grass daily. The following suggestions should be considered
Sell off cull cows now – a financial waste feeding meals with cull cows eating grass. Cull cows are unlikely to be any more valuable in December than now.
Destock by drying off thin cows and heifers during the month and moving away from milking platform.
- ▶ Donal Patton's, Ballyhaise plan is:
 - ▶ Peak cover at 1100kgDm/ha (380/cow) on 1st October,
 - ▶ Closing cover on 10-15th November is 650; this is achieved by carrying over a few 1500kg cover paddocks,
 - ▶ With compact calving and stocked at 2.5 cows/ha, they need 750-900kg DM in spring to minimise meal input.
 - ▶ They start closing on 1st Oct and must have 70 per cent of farm grazed by 1st November.
 - ▶ Some paddocks they carry over will be grazed on 25th September, depending on October growth so as to meet the AFC target of 650kg.
 - ▶ Wet farms should not peak above 900kgs (maybe 1000 if operator is good with good access), while dry farms could go as high as 1250 kgs.
- ▶ If you are now doing 24 hour grazing's you should let cows into the tall grass after the evenings milking because it will be higher in sugars.

Use the Last Rotation Planner!

- ▶ This planner is available through PastureBase and most farmers are now using it to manage their grass for the cows every autumn.
- ▶ This planner will make things extremely simple and easy to keep cows out until late Nov while at the same time ensuring adequate grass is carried over to spring. It outlines the number of hectares you allocate to your cows each day from 6th Oct to 25th Nov.
- ▶ It works on the following principles:
 - ▶ At least 70 per cent of the grazing area must be grazed by 1st Nov.
 - ▶ This is essential so as to have a long rest period for those fields to grow grass before winter, because over 90 per cent of the grass available for cows next Feb will have grown this Oct/Nov.
 - ▶ If the area allocated doesn't give him enough grass, indicated by post-grazing height, then cows must be supplemented with meals or, preferably, very good quality baled silage.
 - ▶ If there is a lot of grass in the area, post-grazing, you either measured the area incorrectly or you have not enough cows for the farm or you are feeding too much silage and/or meals.
- ▶ By measuring grass weekly and recording on PastureBase the computer will 'map' the area eaten against the plan. It will be very easy see if you are 'on track'.
- ▶ If for any reason, a wet week for instance, you cannot graze then you will go 'off target' and you must graze double the amount the next week so as to finish the last rotation on the planned date.

Avoid causing soil compaction

- ▶ Soil compaction results in the soil not being able to grow as much grass as it can or should. And in the "new environment" they are not good "carbon sinks".
- ▶ Soil structure is made up of soil, air and moisture. By poaching you squeeze out the air, so it cannot grow grass and they will also be wetter on the surface.
- ▶ With the facts you should decide on grazing options:
 - ▶ In October, as soils are retaining more moisture, it is vital to graze carefully.
 - ▶ Do not graze damaged fields in the wet, as it will compound the structural damage.
 - ▶ Some fields may have to be "rested" until March or April.
 - ▶ Practice on-off grazing, i.e. three hours grazing after



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each milking and then remove to the house. They will eat 95 per cent of their grass allowance in this period if they come out with a “sharpness” to their appetite.

- ▶ Follow all other recommended practices for grazing in difficult conditions.
- ▶ To meet the new environmental requirements, precision management of grazing must be practiced. “On – off grazing involves bringing in the cows twice per day but at a totally different time (3 hours after let out) to our usual times.

This “bringing-in” time can be made sociable by milking at 7.00 in the morning and again at 3.00 in the afternoon.

This means that the cows will be able to be brought in off the paddocks at 7.00 – 7.30 in late evening. They will just have finished that “bout” of grazing and won’t have done any walking damage.

- ▶ Never, ever let cows out when it is raining and always bring them in when it starts to rain as they do a lot more walking in the rain, and consequently more poaching. Use the weather forecast to plan ‘let-out’ times. It might be raining in the morning but the forecast might tell you it will be dry in the afternoon. Therefore, wait to let out and don’t give them any silage.
- ▶ I am not a fan of spreading slurry with a vacuum tanker because of the wheel compaction damage it does to the soil. Use the umbilical system with a ‘trailed and shoe’ spread.

This is necessary because with the “new” grazing wedge system there is always grass of varying heights on the farm. Spreading slurry on grass greater than 600-700kgs DM causes huge losses due to rotting.

Reduce tax bill by planning

- ▶ Your accountant is key to achieving this goal because in a reasonably good year higher taxes may have to be paid.
- ▶ You must bring your accounts up-to-date and talk to your accountant. He will project forward and inform you of your likely tax bill for 2019.
- ▶ If it going to be high you can consider investments that will pay in the future. Such as:
 - ▶ Spread lime and extra P & K to increase soil Indices to 4. This will give 150 per cent return on investment in the future,
 - ▶ Improve grazing infra-structures, such as roadways, fencing, and water supply to paddocks for a 58 per cent return on the investment.
 - ▶ Pay off all bills in current year.
 - ▶ Can you make a contribution towards your pension?
 - ▶ Can you set-aside a “rainy day” fund – you see how beneficial that was in the Greenfield Site.
 - ▶ If short of slurry, housing accommodation, milking units (1 for every 8 cows is required) or calf accommodation consider the investment.
 - ▶ Consider forward buying some of the big “inputs” , such as fertiliser, meal, mineral and dairy requirements, for 2020 before year end, having got 2-3 quotations for each.

Replacements heifer management

- ▶ Replacement heifer management revolves around their actual weights relative to targets (Table 2)

Cow Type	Mature Weight	Weanling Wt. (37% cow Wt.)	In-calf Heifer (77% of cow)
Holstein;	580	215	445
Holstein X Nor. Red	550	205	425
Holstein X Jersey	530	195	410

Table 2: Target weights (kg) for Replacement Weanling and In-calf Heifers in October.

Replacement heifer calves should get 1 – 1.5 kgs meal (16-18 per cent P) so as to meet target weights on 1st April. All animals below target weights must be taken away from main mob and given priority treatment.

For every 20kg animals are below target they will need to be fed an extra 100kgs meal (16+ per centP).

It must be remembered that animals that are much greater than target weights are also a liability as they will underperform when milking and will be culled out of the herd sooner. Therefore, no meal to them!

- ▶ Small in-calf heifers need 1-2 kgs meal (12-14 per cent P). Otherwise they will calve down too light, resulting in 450 litres lower milk yields for every 50 kgs below target weight at calving. Fewer of them will go in-calf during the first 3 weeks of breeding in 2020.
- ▶ If you haven’t scanned yet do so now and sell off heifers that are not in-calf. If more than 7-8 per cent are not incalf ask yourself; why?
- ▶ Have you inject cows and heifers for Salmonella to prevent abortions? If any weanlings show symptoms of hoose (coughing), stomach worms (sticky dung on tail head) or fluke (scouring + other signs) have them treated as they will not maximise weight gain.
- ▶ This same advice has to be applied if checking up on your heifers that are reared by contract.

Analyse soil & feed

- ▶ Silage should be analysed now both for DMD and minerals, The DMD will inform you now as to your feeding programme for the winter – advantages are obvious! The mineral analysis will identify the mineral status of 40-50 per cent of the grass on your farm in May/June, and will alert you as to the minerals that may deficient in your silage for winter and the grassland in April-May.,
- ▶ Consult your Vet as to the necessary animal test; but they will be dung samples, blood samples and milk samples so that you can plan the various dosing programmes,
- ▶ Take soil samples, so that you can build up soil Indices to 3 and 4.

Habitats on dairy farms?

- ▶ At the Moorepark Open Day Daire O hUllachain made some points that should be considered by dairy farmers.
- ▶ Why biodiversity in land management?
 - ▶ Plants; result in nitrogen fixing,

- ▶ Earthworms are soil engineers,
- ▶ Bees are pollinators,
- ▶ Beetles prey on pests.

EU's Greening measures will probably require that 5 per cent of a farmers' farm will have to be devoted to Habitats. While this topic may annoy some farmers it should not be a big issue as most farms have significant habitats on their farms at present.

- ▶ In the meantime we should be pro-active on habitats:
 - ▶ Try to retain existing habitats,
 - ▶ Try to enhance existing habitats by not doing anything more to damage them,
 - ▶ And try to create new ones at small cost.
 - ▶ Some of the hedgerow management advice for the new Nitrates is worth reminding ourselves:
 - ▶ Leave at least one mature Whitethorn/Blackthorn tree within each hedgerow, where possible only cut hedgerows every 3 years on rotation across the farm. This allows some of these trees to flower every year across the farm. Result is berries as feed for birds.
 - ▶ Cut pollination trees between Nov and Jan,
 - ▶ Let some Brambles and Ivy grow in hedgerows as they are key nectar and pollen sources in summer and autumn.
 - ▶ Aim to have hedgerows as high as possible, but at least 2.5m, above ground level,
 - ▶ Let some hedgerows grow wild – side trimming only.
 - ▶ Avoid spraying hedgerow base, using spot spraying or mechanical control in exceptional cases.

- ▶ Leave unfertile buffer margin at the hedgerow base.
- ▶ On the southerly side of ditches expose clay surface, with a digger, so that bees can burrow into it.

Brief Notes

- ▶ Use soiled water and/or slurry at 1000 – 1500 gallons per acre up to 15 Oct to get grass growth from the Nitrogen contained therein.
- ▶ It is uneconomical to feed more than 2-3 kgs meal (15 per cent P) now.
- ▶ You should get the Farm Relief Service to examine your herd for lameness, particularly, if you have a history of it. At the very least, walk the cows through a footbath for 3 consecutive days once or twice per month. Also there is merit in doing a locomotive survey of the herd as they walk from the parlour.
- ▶ Make out a list of maintenance work to be done by either one man or for two-man tasks.
- ▶ Assess the amount of forage you have relative to requirement:
 - ▶ The following is the requirement/animal/day in Dry Matter (best way to do it):
 - ▶ Cows =11kgs; Weanlings = 4.7kgs and Incalf Heifers =9kgs
 - ▶ If you are short, very few are, decide on your options NOW.
 - ▶ If you have plenty of feed and you are thinking of expanding you should consider buying incalf or weanlings now.

“Business is based on relationships” (Sir Chay Blyth)



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