

Tillage

CROP ROUND UP

James Irish, Agronomist

With current grain prices there is no room to cut corners in crop production. The biggest factor determining cost per tonne of grain is yield, therefore yield per hectare needs to be maximised in a cost effective way. The area of winter crops locally has increased significantly, approximately 20%. Crop establishment is excellent with good yield potential. With two to three times the average rainfall over the past few weeks and an unseasonably mild autumn, crops are more advanced than normal but this is not ideal, as they are trying to grow in saturated soils. In flooded areas some barley crops have lost tillers but in most areas there is no significant damage. Most field work is up-to-date apart from a



few late sown wheat crops that need to be sprayed for weeds and aphids. The majority of soil nitrogen mineralised in the autumn has been washed away. Barley crops will be the

first port of call needing compound NPK fertiliser as soon as ground is suitable to travel and before any major growth starts. This will probably be from the 20th February onwards.

Fertiliser planning 2016

Soil testing is the basis of forming a fertiliser plan and an invaluable tool that helps accurately measure and manage the pH and nutrient status of soils. A fertiliser plan should be completed for all crops at this stage and the plan should be based on crop off takes (Table 1) and soil test results. This is particularly important after huge crop off-takes from high yields in 2015. Bretts offers the full range of soil testing including soil mapping.

Table 1. Crop off-takes for P and K

Crop	Yield t/ acre	P units/acre	K units/acre
Winter Wheat/ Barley	4.8	37	95
Winter Oats	4	30	115
Spring Wheat + Barley	3.6	27	82
Beans	2.8	27	56

- Remember these figures are only crop off-takes, below optimum soil status also needs to be accounted for.
- Organic Manures are a valuable source of nutrition where they can be sourced locally, but remember slurry can be variable and water is cheap.
- Sulphur is also an important element; cereals and grass require 15 – 20 units per year.

Spring crops

It is now time to plan spring cropping. Spring barley will be the main choice. Beans performed very well in 2015 both in terms of yield and financial return and are a very good break crop when planted on the right site. If the weather is suitable, the area will be set to increase again in 2016. See below for details on spring cereal varieties available from Bretts this year. All these varieties are fully approved on the 2016 DAFM Recommended List.

Table 2. Spring Varieties

Brett Varieties	Spring Barley			Spring Oats	Spring Wheat
	KWS Irina	Mickle	Sanette	Husky	Quintus
Yield	102	101	101	105	105
Comment	Highest yielding variety on list, excellent disease package, weaker on grain quality	Good yield and grain quality, Best straw on list, suitable for fertile sites, good on Rhyncho	Good yield, resistance to lodging, excellent disease package.	High yield, grain quality and straw	Highest yield, very good disease

Note: It is important to check thousand grain weight (TGW) of seed as it can vary greatly between varieties. There can be a difference in the sowing rate of up to 16 kg per hectare between varieties.

Dairy

RUMINANT SUPPORT SERVICE

With projected milk prices it is essential to maximise the litres of milk sold off your farm. More milk sold will generate more cash that helps to dilute the fixed costs on a per litre basis. In 2009 when similar milk prices were experienced, there was one valuable lesson; under feeding cows in early spring has long lasting negative effects in the herd.

Grass covers are exceptionally high but with the current weather conditions it will be a challenge to utilise this grass. Many dairy farmers are asking what feed to use and how much to feed. Our answer is simple, there is no fixed recommended rate that can be applied to every farm.

Here is our Nutritionist's alphabetic A-H guide

A = All Farms Differ

No two farms are the same so become confident with your own situation and make informed decisions to suit your system.

B = Breed + Yield Differences

Herd genetics vary greatly from Holstein Friesian herds to Jersey crossbred herds. There is no 'right or wrong' breed as all can be profitable if fed correctly. The peak yield potential on two neighbouring farms could be as much as 15 litres (over 3 gallons).

C = Condition Score

Watch cows and monitor body condition score in early lactation. A loss of 0.5 body condition score (~25 kgs body weight) greatly reduces submission rates and conception rates.

D = Diet + Feed on Farm

Consider all the feeds available on your farm and ask one of our Ruminant Support team to check that the diet is balanced. The protein in the total diet, including grass, silages, straw and parlour feed, should be at least 16%.



E = Energy Intake

Energy intake is the biggest driver of animal performance in terms of milk yield, milk solids and subsequent fertility. The freshly calved cow needs to get enough dry matter intake from all the feeds on offer to her. Wet spring grass poses a huge challenge as cows physically can't eat enough to get sufficient energy. As an example, wet grass has a dry matter of 13% and to achieve 10kgs DMI the cow needs to eat 77kgs of grass. In a freshly calved cow this is not a realistic target. Dry matter intake (DMI) depends on milk yield:

- 16 kgs DMI for 25 litres
- 18 kgs DMI for 30 litres

F = Flexible Feed

If purchasing a feed for the parlour make sure that it has a flexible feeding level in terms of Cal Mag levels and minerals. With unpredictable weather conditions the option to increase feed is required if cows cannot get out and many 'grazing' cubes have a maximum feed rate of 3-4 Kgs. Match the protein of the feed to your total diet.



G = Ground Conditions and Grass Intakes Vary

Grass supply on the majority of farms is excellent but be realistic about the actual grass intakes. Introduce grass gradually into the cows diet, offer silage for at least two weeks until the rumen gets used to grass and cows are eating a minimum of 10 kgs dry matter of grass. Weather has the biggest influence on the ground conditions and subsequent grass utilisation. Keep your system flexible and be prepared to make changes when necessary. Do not overestimate grass intake.

H = Health Status

As herds expand there is a greater risk that animal husbandry can be compromised. Farms must not let this happen. The cow's immune system is at its lowest in the last ten days before calving and the first three weeks after calving, so watch cows carefully for signs of ill health. The basic indicators are lack of appetite and milk drop. Make sure cows have unlimited access to clean water. If there is an increased incidence of retained cleanings, ketosis, displaced abomasums, milk fever or any other disease, please contact your Ruminant Support Specialist and/or Vet for a joint approach to resolve the problem.

BRETTS RECOMMENDATIONS:

- If there is no or limited grass included in the diet feed Milkwell 18% or Milk Max 19% with grass silage.
- Use a higher protein feed if wholecrop silage or fodder beet has been incorporated into the diet.
- Only feed lower protein supplements (14%-16% CP) once grass is in the diet on a continuous basis. Bretts MaxiBreeder Cube 14 or Ultra Dairy 16 are ideal once grass is in the diet at a minimum of 6 kgs DM per day.
- For a Holstein Friesian cow with good milk potential the merits to success in terms of maintaining body condition is to feed at a minimum of 5.5 kgs/cow day for 25 litres. Cows doing 30 litres require 7.5 kgs/cow/day.

Grassland Management

MANAGING GRASS IN SPRING 2016

Michael Foley, Ruminant Support Specialist

On livestock farms this year there is an abundance of grass. It is a 'good' complaint but the big challenge is how to utilise this grass if weather conditions do not improve.

- For beef and dairy farms a simple guide is to use the Teagasc Spring Rotation Planner to manage grass supply in the first round. On dry farms with early turn out dates, aim to have 30% of your grazing allocation grazed by 1st March and 60% by 17th March. On wetter farms these dates will extend by up to ten days.
- Graze the driest paddocks first, and keep to lighter covers when there are fewer animals turned out. Skip very heavy covers until you have larger numbers of animals to utilise the grass. Use strip wires to allocate smaller portions.
- Young stock, especially weanling heifers behind target, could be turned out to the drier parts of the farm providing that there is plenty of shelter.
- Despite tight cash flow soil fertility must not be ignored as it drives grass growth, grass and silage quality. Higher than normal grass growth recorded over the winter will have depleted nitrogen reserves and excessive rain will have caused further leaching. If you have low index soils you must continue to apply P and K and also be mindful of sulphur. Consult with your Bretts Ruminant Support Specialist about drawing up a fertiliser plan to suit your farm.
- Keep an open mind, be prepared to take the opportunities to graze when they arise but change the plan in accordance with the weather.
- Do not sacrifice animal performance or paddocks if the weather is against you.

Sheep

LATE PREGNANCY EWE NUTRITION

David Lawrence, Ruminant Support Specialist

Between 75% and 80% of foetal growth happens in the last 50 days of gestation in pregnant ewes. Therefore the daily demand for energy increases significantly in the last two months of pregnancy. The most effective way to meet the energy and protein demands of pregnant ewes is by putting them on a rising plane of nutrition with concentrate from now until birth. Avoid allocating no more than 500 g /ewe in one feeding. General feeding guidelines for scanned ewes (average weight 70 kg) on good silage, at point of lambing:

- Singles 0.5 kg
- Twins 0.7 kg
- Triplets 0.9 kg

Feeding levels may change due to ewe size, housing and forage quality and we therefore recommend discussing this with the Brett's Ruminant Support Team. Lambs require 50 ml of colostrum per 1 kg of birth weight in the first hour of life to insure successful transfer of immunity from the ewe. The quality of ewe cubes has a major influence on the yield and quality of colostrum and milk, which is why Brett Supreme Ewe Cubes contain high levels of Barley, Soya Bean Meal, Selenium and Vitamin E. Effective supplementation of Selenium and Vitamin E in pregnant ewes has been proven to reduce the time taken for lambs to stand and to suck.



Staff Announcement

Congratulations to our Ruminant Support Specialist Dr. David Lawrence who was awarded a PhD in Animal Nutrition from UCD, for his work entitled "An Examination of Concentrate Feeding Strategies and Grass Sward Management for Autumn Calving Dairy Herds".



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