

Brett's Tillage Seminar

During the month of February, we welcomed over 100 of our grain growers to the Brett's Tillage Seminar in Clonmel. The cereal sector faces many challenges and we formed a panel to discuss new technology relating to disease control, genetics and

soil management. Thanks to everyone who attended and contributed to the discussions and we are also grateful to our panel of visiting speakers Seamus Kearney, D.A.F.F., Louise McNamara, Teagasc and Consultant John Geraghty.



Silage planning starts now...

Making good silage needs a planned approach. There are crucial steps to be carried out and management of these steps will determine the success of your silage.

Spring sward management - "Graze bare before closing up ground to avoid loss in silage digestibility"

Graze out silage ground tightly to remove the "dead butt", which can negatively impact silage digestibility. Apply slurry before grazing where applicable as late slurry application may lead to increased levels of potassium in silage or limit successful preservation. Avoid applying lime on silage ground in the spring. Rolling is important to minimise soil contamination in silage particularly where swards have been grazed in wet conditions.

Spring Fertiliser - "Pick a date and have a plan, 2 units of N per day from spreading to harvest"

Poor soil fertility and low sulphur levels limit the plants ability to utilise nitrogen for protein production. The rule of thumb is that 2 units of nitrogen are used by the crop per day prior to harvesting. Therefore work backwards from your intended harvesting date to calculate the amount of nitrogen required on the date of application. Remember, some nitrogen is still available from slurry and earlier applications of fertiliser so

factor this into your nitrogen requirement.

Weed control - "A 10 % dock infestation means you have one full bale or shear grab of docks in every 10"

Now is the month to get on top of weeds. Apply a suitable herbicide at the correct weed control stage (at least 4 weeks prior to silage harvest).

Harvesting Date - "Harvest in mid-May to maximise on digestibility and yield"

Harvest date is the vital step in ensuring highly digestible silage.

Table 1. shows the effect of delaying closing date on silage digestibility. A 65 DMD silage means that only 65% silage which is eaten is digestible, in other words 35 % of your silage is not available for milk or meat production. Silage must be harvested with enough sugars to ensure good preservation. Grass is high in sugar during a period of bright days and cool nights.

Harvest Date	8 May	22 May	29 May	5 June	19 June
Yield (t DM/ha)	3.99	5.96	6.79	7.82	8.93
DMD %	77.9	76.6	74.6	69.2	64.3

Source: Teagasc Grange

Table 1

Bulk fertiliser spreading is available from Bretts, talk to your Sales Rep for further information. Bulk spreading uses GPS for accurate spreading, while also saving you time.

Key Messages for Livestock Farmers

- **Weather** is probably the biggest factor during the spring. Don't sacrifice animal performance or paddocks if the weather is against you.
- **Opening Covers** are higher than normal this year and the temptation is to move quickly to high grass allocations, but an accurate approach is required, especially as demand will increase quickly due to compact calving.
- **Budget** grass and silage every week or fortnight. Many farms have very little fodder reserves. Where grass is available get youngstock, maiden heifers and store cattle turned out to save on fodder that may be needed at a later date.
- **Transition** cows to grass slowly after calving. Grass is a high protein, highly digestible, energy rich feed; which is the complete opposite to average silage results, so transition slowly to avoid rumination issues and metabolic illness.

Feeding Guidelines for Dairy Cows

- Remain flexible and adjust feeding levels depending on grazing conditions, grass supply, cow body condition score and milk yield. The circumstances will vary from farm to farm
- Recommended rates will have to be increased if weather is wet and grazing conditions are adversely affected resulting in reduced dry matter intake from grass

Table 2 – Recommended feeding levels for cows on grass (day and night) including grass Dry Matter (DM) intake and Milk Yield.

	Milk Yield		
Grass fulltime	22 Litres	26 Litres	30 Litres
12 kgs DM Grass + Parlour Feeding	3.5 Kgs	5.5 Kgs	7.5 Kgs
14 kgs DM Grass + Parlour Feeding	1.5 Kgs	3.5 Kgs	5.5 Kgs

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Bretts Ultra Calf Special Offer until 31st March

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