

ROUND UP FROM THE IRISH GRASSLAND DAIRY CONFERENCE 2022

by **David Lawrence, IGA Council Member**

For those who missed the Irish Grassland Dairy Annual Conference, here is a quick summary of the main points discussed. The focus was on the use of current and new technologies to support the sustainability of Irish dairy systems in a time of challenging environmental pressures.

Three dairy farmers, David Fennelly, Francis Nolan and Robert O'Dea provided practical examples of methods being taken to become more sustainable, both environmentally and productively. David outlined strategies to reduce the farms dependence on fertiliser while improving efficiency of production through smart animal breeding and improving biodiversity. Three key steps to reduce nitrogen use included a focus on improving soil fertility, red clover silage and more prudent use of fertiliser during times of poor response.

Francis demonstrated how investing in technologies (such as heat detection collars and drafting system, some automation, and solar panels) on his farm is having a positive impact on farm labour, animal management and environmental impact. This was supported by a technical paper given by Dr. John Upton, which outlined some of the devices that can be installed on your farm to reduce your electricity usage.

Robert O'Dea gave his account of using clover swards to minimise his dependence on purchased Nitrogen.

Dr. Michael Dineen discussed the management of red clover in grass silage swards (the summary of which can be found in table 1). Dr Michael Egan also delivered a comprehensive update on the recent research surrounding white clover and the management of spring grazing.

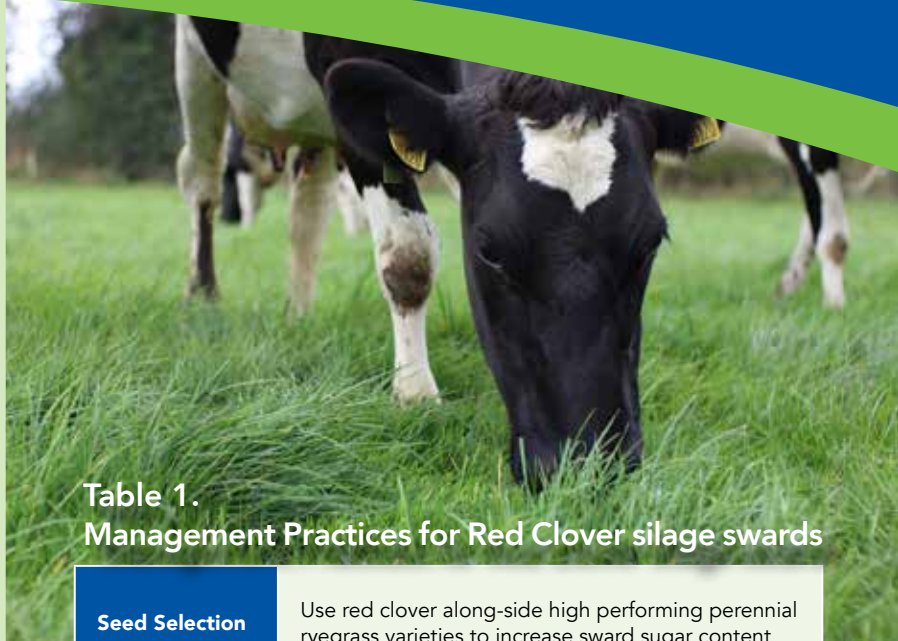


Table 1.
Management Practices for Red Clover silage swards

Seed Selection	Use red clover along-side high performing perennial ryegrass varieties to increase sward sugar content
Sowing Rate	3-4 kg/acre of red clover with 8-9 kg/acre ryegrass
Sowing Date	Ideally from April to late July
Soil Fertility	pH 6-7 with index 3 for P and K
Fertiliser	Lower N application levels will result in more persistent red clover
Harvesting	First cut in mid-May with subsequent cuts 6-8 weeks apart. Wilt the crop to 25-35% DM and reduce handling to avoid leaf loss. Consider silage additives in poorer weather. P and K should be replaced depending on offtakes with slurry playing a key role.
Autumn Management	Enter the winter with light covers <1000 kg DM/ha, a final grazing or zero grazing may be required. Be cautious of bloat if grazing late in the season.

Source: Dr. Michael Dineen (2023) IGA Dairy Conference

An excellent presentation given by Noreen Lacey of IFAC accountants aroused discussion amongst attendants as they followed realistic scenarios on the financial impacts of the new Nitrates Action Programme (NAP). Farms in band three are likely to incur a significant reduction in income, the closer they are to the upper limit of derogation (currently set at 250 kg of Org N/ha). More pertinently, these farms are likely to have a very serious reduction in overall profitability if the proposed reduction to the upper limit of derogation is reduced to 220 kg of Org N/ha, leading to a 26% reduction in cow numbers on Noreen's example.

Noreen urged farmers to review their own individual circumstance and to put an appropriate plan in place. There is widespread concern amongst farmers regarding what the NAP will mean for their business, please seek professional advice, and have a plan for the incoming season.

CALVING 2023

We wish everyone a safe and successful calving period this spring. The focus is having a healthy, fertile and productive cow with a viable calf. Optimising the use of grass in the system while not underfeeding the cow in early lactation is the cornerstone of good fertility and the aim is to minimise body condition loss in the first six weeks after calving. Milk Fever can be problematic on some farms. Talk to your Brett's Sales Representative immediately to find a solution.

MILK FEVER

- Milk fever normally occurs close to calving or within the first few days of calving. The cause is a reduced concentration of blood calcium known as Hypocalcaemia. The disease is more prominent in herds with a high degree of jersey genetics, cows calving down with excess body condition and older cows. If a cow goes down this a clinical case. Sub-clinical cases are those where the cow struggles on but will show other problems such as slow calving or retained afterbirth.
- The majority of cases occur 1 day after calving due to colostrum production draining blood calcium reserves. As a result, cows require additional supplementation via injection or high concentration of oral calcium (Reviva post calving supplement or a calcium bolus).
- The dry cow diet is important in reducing the risk of milk fever as it 'tunes' the cow's metabolism for efficient calcium absorption. In the dry period there should be no calcium fed. During the dry period, a cow requires Magnesium and Vitamin D3 which 'programs' the cow to put calcium away in reserve for post calving.
- Silage high in potash (greater than 2.5% K) may interfere with calcium and magnesium and increase the risk of milk fever. Brett's have Magnesium Chloride available, however seek technical advice from our team for appropriate rates to suit your farm.
- Fatter cows are at a greater risk than thinner cows. This is partly because their feed and calcium intake has been higher and because fatter cows produce more milk at calving time by 'milking off their back.'



SPECIAL OFFER

Goldstart Calf Milk Replacer
2 bags free on every full pallet
(1.2 tons or 60 bags) and a **free**
Portwest Bodywarmer for all
orders delivered in February.



TOP TIP

Measure milk replacer accurately by using a scales and graduated measuring jug

The 5 'Cs' of Successful Calf Rearing

The key to calf rearing is keeping things simple, having a plan and getting the basics right

Colostrum – remember the 1,2,3 rule which is the first feed of colostrum within the first 2 hours of birth and a minimum of 3 litres

Comfort – calves need a dry, draught free, warm bed with plenty of straw and good ventilation above them

Consistency – feed calves at the same time each day and ensure that milk replacer powder is measured accurately and whole milk volumes offered are accurate, check automatic feeders

Cleanliness – all milk feeding equipment must be washed daily and anyone visiting the calf shed should have clean boots dipped in disinfectant

Calories – calves require daily feed to contribute to daily growth, maintain function and keep warm and hydrated

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