

We are here to help

Spring 2024 has been extremely challenging for all farms. Tillage farms have been battling the elements since last harvest and winter sowing was severely hampered and has been further hit with ground conditions preventing the ploughing and sowing of spring crops. Since last summer, there has been excessive rainfall and despite good grass growth the difficult grazing conditions in March were further compounded by rapidly declining silage reserves.

Declining silage stocks, poor weather and rising costs from extra feed will challenge your daily stamina but remember it is only five years since we dealt with similar situations on farms and we weathered that storm with no long term impact on animal performance.

It is important to stay positive and to remember that everyone is facing the same challenges and that our Agronomy and Ruminant support team are here to listen and offer advice. We are freely available to offer advice that is tailored to your farm so pick up the phone and we can help you work through this difficult time.

Crude Protein in Dairy Feed

April is upon us and this is just a reminder that to comply with guidance from Department of Agriculture that from April 15th to September 30th for animals over two years of age, that are grazing full time, the maximum permitted level of protein will be 15%. Calves and animals under two years of age are excluded. Hopefully there will be better grazing conditions for April and we will be launching our full range of dairy cubes for the spring summer period.

Every Farm is Different

Dairy farmers often ask our Technical Sales Representative 'How much should I be feeding the cows?' The answer varies greatly depending on stage of lactation, silage quality, grazing conditions, genetics and milk yield taking into consideration milk butterfat/protein results. With the breeding season just around the corner our Ruminant Support Specialists are concerned about poor body condition on many farms. Table 1 outlines feeding recommendations.

Table 1
Feeding recommendations

Forage Available	Parlour Feed Required	Milk Yield		
		22 Litres	26 Litres	30 Litres
		*Energy Required		
		15.5 UFL	17.5 UFL	19.5 UFL
**Grass Silage Ad-lib (12 kgs DM of 70% DMD)	Milkwell 18% Milk Max18%	6.0 kg	8.0 kg	10.0 kg
Grass by day 6kg DM **Silage by night	PIP Spring 16% Ultra Dairy 16% Grass Match 15%	5.5 kg	7.5 kg	9.5 kg
Grass by day 12kg DM and offer access to silage at milking	PIP/Ultra Spring 16% Grass Match 15% Maxi Breeder 14%	4.0 kg	6.0 kg	8.0 kg

*UFL Requirement for 550 Kg Cow gaining 0.25 BCS on approach to breeding 3.35% Protein and 4.45% Fat
 **70% DMD silage UFL value = 0.8UFL and Grass has UFL = 1.0
 ***Every 5% DMD in grass silage is similar energy to approx 1 kg of concentrate



Planning for 2025 Silage

Following the record-breaking rainfall it would be easy to get downhearted but it is now April and it is paramount that a suitable plan is put in place for this season's silage crop. Successful silage should be in excess of 72% DMD and adequately preserved. Please see the following management requirements to achieve success this silage harvest.



1: Spring sward management

The recommendation is to graze silage ground tightly in the spring to 4cm to remove a 'dead butt' which, may have gathered over the winter. Given the saturated soil conditions this spring, this may not be the case for all farms. Where paddocks were grazed well at closing there is less requirement to graze in the spring. Moderate to strong grass covers on silage ground will hold soil moisture meaning this ground may be slower to dry out. An earlier cutting date will more than compensate for the loss in DMD from carrying through dead leaf material. Grazing this ground may cause poaching which will reduce regrowth and increase the risk of soil contamination. If you intend cutting earlier (Before mid-May) it may now be too late for slurry application on that ground, slurry should then be deferred to immediately after the 1st cut. An early cut of silage will lead to earlier regrowth that can help reduce the impact of drought on the second cut. Once ground is closed for silage, please assess the sward for docks and contact your Bretts team member for advice on choosing a suitable herbicide.

2: Spring fertiliser

The first decision that should be made this year is the intended harvesting date. Work back from your intended harvesting date to your fertiliser application date and allow two units of nitrogen for each day in between, to a maximum of 90 units. Take account of organic nitrogen that may have been applied in slurry and previous fertiliser rounds. Lower N application will offer more flexibility for harvesting date. Older pasture or swards that are poor in soil fertility will have a poorer potential to grow out excess nitrogen. Do not apply lime on silage ground in spring. Lime interacts with nitrogen and significant time must be allowed to maximise the N utilisation. Lime can also contaminate grass causing your silage to not preserve correctly. Save lime application for the autumn.

3: Choosing a harvesting date

Harvest date is the single most important factor in achieving high DMD silage. Table 2 shows the effect of silage DMD when the harvesting date is delayed. A 65 DMD silage means that only 65% of the dried material is digested by the cow and 35% of your silage does not contribute to digestible nutrition. Ideally, silage should be harvested in bright, sunny conditions to ensure the sugar content is high enough for successful preservation. Rather than delaying harvest date by several days for the most ideal conditions a rapid wilt and good inoculant such as Ecosyl can result in successful silage without the loss of DMD, provided the silage is not excessively high in excess nitrogen.



Farewell to Seamus

In March we were sorry to see Seamus Whitty, who has been our Technical Sales Representative in East Waterford and Wexford for the past 10 years, leave us for pastures new. Seamus will be missed by all of us and his customers who benefited greatly from his dedication and technical expertise. We want to wish Seamus all the best in his future career within the industry and wish to also thank our customers in Waterford and Wexford for their continued support. Our existing team members PJ, David and Patrick, led by Michael Foley, are looking after customer accounts in the interim.

Seamus Whitty (centre) who has left for pastures new, pictured with Michael Foley and Heather Peppard.



4: Rolling to reduce soil contamination

Rolling silage ground will reduce the number of sods that are high enough to come in contact with the mower or tedder. Soil contamination is a growing problem as shown in our mineral silage analysis from last year and can lead to a multitude of nutritional problems and mineral imbalances.

Table 2. The effect of harvest date on silage yield and digestibility

Harvest Date	1 May	8 May	15 May	22 May	29 May	5 June	12 June	19 June
Yield (t DM/ha)	2.92	3.99	4.98	5.96	6.79	7.82	8.48	8.93
DMD %	79.9	77.9	77.5	76.6	74.6	69.2	67.9	64.3

Source: Teagasc, Grange Beef Research Centre

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Callan, Co. Kilkenny
Tel: 056 7755300

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Windgap, Co. Kilkenny
Tel: 051 648204

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Ardfinnan, Co. Tipperary
Tel: 052 7466208

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Portlawn, Co. Waterford
Tel: 051 387396