



Easter Greetings to everyone!

Thankfully since mid-March there has been a welcome improvement in our weather and it has been great to see stock out grazing, slurry and fertiliser being applied and field work progressing. It has been a welcome sight to see our tillage farmers sowing beans, which are a valuable source of native protein for our animal feed range.

Diary Dates

- **Planning ahead for Bank Holiday Weekends**

With a number of Bank Holidays falling over the coming months it is important to keep one eye on the feed bin and the other on the calendar to ensure that you don't run out of inputs and that orders are placed in time to avoid delivery delays.

- **Wednesday April 15th**

Changes to feed protein levels in Dairy Feed:

- Under the 2026 Nitrates Derogation the level of crude protein in feed will have a maximum level of 14% on all livestock holdings with stocking rates of 130kg/Ha of organic nitrogen.
- This measure applies from April 15th until September 30th for all grazing animals over 2 years of age.

Preparing for Silage

Following the wet ground conditions this year it is essential that a good plan is put in place for this year's silage crop. Striving for high quality first cut silage should be the target for every livestock farmer and here are a number of key factors.

Soil Fertility

Soil analysis is a basis for making correct decisions on fertiliser application for silage crops. 90% of all soils tested in Ireland have shown a deficiency in either P, K or pH. Just over 50% of P is available to grass production with a soil pH of 6.

Spring Sward Management

The recommendation to graze silage ground tightly in March to remove the "dead butt" may not apply in all cases this year. What is now more important for many swards is to try and achieve an early cut to maximise DMD. If the intention is to cut silage in mid-May it may be too late to apply slurry, particularly if there is grass carried over or there is a cover of grass. Rolling is important to minimise soil contamination in silage, particularly where swards have been grazed in wet conditions. April is the month to get on top of weeds. A 10% dock infestation equates to one full bale or shear grab of docks in every 10!

Spring Fertiliser

Poor soil fertility and low sulphur levels limit the plant's 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. This should be factored into your nitrogen requirement. Avoid applying lime on silage ground in the spring.

Harvesting Date

When it comes to silage harvesting there is always the temptation to go for more bulk but it is important to stress that this is to the detriment of silage quality. The aim should be to target an early harvest date to ensure highly digestible silage. Table 1 shows the effect of delayed harvest date on silage digestibility. 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.

Table 1. The effect of harvest date on silage yield and digestibility

Harvesting 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



Breeding is just around the Corner

With the breeding season just around the corner, it is important that cows are in good condition and at the correct body condition score (BCS). Cows need to be on a rising plane of nutrition and get sufficient dry matter and energy intake to meet milk yield, otherwise they will 'milk off their back' and loose body condition at the expense of fertility. A commonly asked question is "How much should I be feeding the Cow?"- the answer varies greatly depending on the stage of lactation, silage quality, grazing conditions, herd genetics and milk yield. See Table 3 below.

Table 3. Recommended minimum parlour feed rates (kgs/cow/day) based on grass intake and milk yield

Forage intake - kg DM/cow/day	DAILY MILK YIELD (Litres)		
	24	28	32
6 kg Grass DM + 6 kg DM Silage (70% DMD)	6.4	8.4	10.4
12 kgs DM Grass (out full-time)	5.0	7.0	9.0
14 kgs DM Grass (out full-time)	2.8	4.8	6.8

Source: Prof Finbar Mulligan (UCD Lyons Farm)

Bretts Breeder Cube Range

Bretts offer two 14% dairy cubes that are ideal for the main grazing season while breeding dairy cows.

Our range includes our Performance Improvement Pack (PIP) of protected minerals selenium, copper and zinc combined with biotin and essential oils to improve the utilisation of grass protein. Native cereals such as barley, oats and beans combined with higher energy maize are the main ingredients in Bretts Breeder Cubes.

Maxi Breeder Cubes are our bestselling dairy cube from April right through to July and offer a flexible feed rate of 3-7 kgs/cow/day.

Supreme Breeder Cubes offer a nutritional solution to minimise the extent of the butterfat drop on lush leafy grass. The inclusion of Actisaf Yeast and Rumen Buffers maintains optimum rumen pH, aids rumen function, reduces the risk of acidosis and the negative effects associated with it, such as a drop in milk butterfat and cows presenting with loose, bubbly dung. Customers report more consistent dungs, better rumen fill and improved butterfat and protein percentage. From our own experience the key to optimum results is to start feeding **Supreme Breeder** approximately 7 days before hitting the 2nd rotation grass.



2026 Grass Seed Range

Bretts 2026 grass seed range is now available to order.

Gold Sward

- High-quality cut & graze mix
- Balanced growth across the season
- Highly palatable for improved herd & flock performance
- Includes Clodagh & Dungloe clover

GOLD SWARD			
Inclusion Rate	Variety	Type	Heading Date
3.2 kg	Banbridge	Intermediate Tetraploid	26th May
3.2 kg	Glenfield	LateTetraploid	3rd June
5.0 kg	AstonConqueror	Intermediate Diploid	27th May
0.3 kg	Dungloe	Medium Leaf Clover	
0.3 kg	Clodagh	Large Leaf Clover	
12.0 kg			

Gold Sward Extend

- Built for intensive systems & derogation farms
- Equal diploid & tetraploid blend
- Dense sward with strong spring & autumn growth
- Top-Performing PPI varieties

GOLD SWARD EXTEND			
Inclusion Rate	Variety	Type	Heading Date
2.7 kg	AberGain	Late Tetraploid	4th June
3.0 kg	GraceHill	LateTetraploid	4th June
3.7 kg	AberChoice	Late Diploid	11th June
2.0 kg	Ballyvoy	Late Diploid	3rd June
0.6 kg	Aberswan Clover	Medium Leaf	
12.0 kg			

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