

GRAZING BULLETIN

CHESTNUTT ANIMAL FEEDS LTD

Investment in Grazing

Grazed or zero grazed grass potentially offers you a high protein, high energy feed source at a lower cost than silage and concentrates. However the word **POTENTIALLY** must be highlighted, just like a pit of silage, grass quality varies massively depending on how it is managed. It is costly to your bottom line to either **over** OR **underestimate** the value of your grass. To utilise grass effectively the guess work must be removed, by measuring grass cover, calculating requirements and basing grass management decisions around this.

Providing a consistent diet, and accounting for variations in weather and grazing conditions is the key to getting optimum performance at grass. That said, a grazing system is not best practice for every farm, so ensure the pros outweigh the cons!



Grazing at the Optimum Stage

A grass plant only has 3 growing leaves at any one time, when the fourth leaf appears the oldest leaf is dying. Diagram 1 illustrates this.

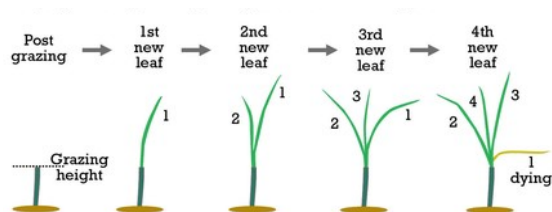


Diagram 1

Grazing grass at the 3 leaf stage provides a balance that maximises intake potential, grass quality and maximum regrowth. Grass at the 3 leaf stage is 15cm high and covers consist of 3000 kg/DM per Ha. This is the optimum cover for grazing and zero-grazing.

A welly boot can often be used as a guide to predict grass cover. Photograph 1 illustrates a grass cover of 3000kg/DM Ha (optimum grazing)



Photograph 1

Grass Intake is Key!

Milk yield potential from grass is largely driven by dry matter intake (DMI). DMI is affected by much more than just grass availability. Factors that largely effect grass intakes are

- ⇒ Grass quality/digestibility
- ⇒ Dry matter content of grass
- ⇒ Grazing conditions
- ⇒ Ground conditions

During the month of May, a cow grazing during the day only is expected to have a grass DMI of 7-8kg, while a cow grazing full time can have a grass DMI of 14-16kg. All of the above factors must be favorable to achieve this, and if so grazed grass has the potential to support 18 - 20 litres of milk production.

Lower quality swards and/or wet conditions can drop DMI by 2 - 3kg/day, equating to a milk production loss of 4 - 6 litres. If ground conditions are poor, then there will be a greater drop in DMI and milk production, as a lot of grass offered will be poached into the ground.

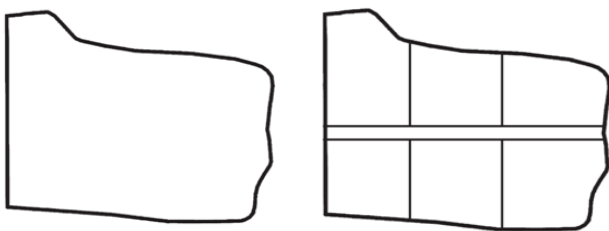
Be realistic when predicting cow DMI, otherwise cow condition, fertility and milk production will suffer. In times of challenge cows must be offered additional concentrate in the parlour, or a TMR of blend and silage.

Grazing Strategies

Rather than just opening the gate and letting cows graze, it is vital to adopt a grazing. Paddock systems offer the best opportunity of maximising growth and quality of grass. Aim to offer cows equal size paddocks, or divide larger fields using electric fencing. The size of the paddocks you require will depend on -

- Number of cows grazing
- Daytime only or fulltime grazing
- Expected dry matter intake per cow

Unallocated grazing vs Paddock System



Calculating Herd Requirements

100 fulltime grazing cows will require 15kg DM Grass / Day.
 $15 \times 100 \text{ Cows} = 1500\text{kg DM/Day}$

Assuming a realistic grazing grass cover of 3200kg/DM/Ha, grazed to a residual of 1700kg DM/Ha = 1500kg DM/Ha is available.
 $1500/1500 = 1 \text{ Ha/Day}$ is required to graze 100 cows.

A 24 day rotation will require 24 Ha (60acres) to graze 100 cows fulltime. In periods of peak grass growth some of this could be cut for silage.

Managing Transition to Grazing

Cows like consistency and a change onto a grass based diet can put them under additional pressure. When cows go to lush grass, they can potentially have issues with grass tetany, negative energy balance, sub acute ruminal acidosis (SARA) and a reduction in milk solids.

A gradual transition onto grass will minimise these risks. Feeding tailored grazing rations will also help to combat these challenges to maintain optimum health and fertility.

Summer Rations

In order to reduce the negative effect of SARA on milk solids and cow energy balance, our summer rations contain the market leading rumen conditioner **Acid Buf**. Trials conducted on grazing herds by UCD, have shown that Acid Buf will stabilise rumen pH, reducing the cases of SARA and increasing feed efficiency.

In addition to this our rations also contain **Yea-sacc** live yeast, the most widely researched yeast culture on the market. Yea-sacc promotes rumen stability, by stimulating the bacteria responsible for fibre digestion and acid removal, helping cows avoid fluctuations in rumen pH, which can interfere with fibre digestion, feed intake and feed efficiency.

Effect of YEA-SACC

