

Our ability in Ireland to grow huge volumes of grass for up to 10 months of the year is the main reason Irish Agriculture remains so competitive throughout the world and has allowed us to become an important exporter of farm produce and a valued earner of foreign revenue for our country. Grass accounts for over 60% of our Agri output which highlights our clean-green image worldwide.



At present grass is a scarce commodity on farm, but even with the harsh weather, the fertile-most recent reseeded areas are the greener pastures. 90% of our soils have sub-optimal fertility for grass growth and only 2% of our grassland is reseeded annually. Low soil phosphorus levels can reduce grass yields by up to 1.5 tonnes of dry matter per hectare or €241 worth per hectare. Grazed grass is our cheapest feedstuff, it is even 2.5 times cheaper than grass silage.

At present on Irish farms the annual production of grass is 9 tonnes per hectare of dry matter on average but the range is staggering and goes from below 6 to 15. When this range is turned into money it goes from €966 per hectare/year to €2415 per hectare/year worth of grass dry matter. (A difference of €1449/year). The figure of €1449 represents the possible gains that can be achieved from keeping your land fertile and reseeding regularly. Teagasc have found that a grass sward containing only 65% perennial ryegrass composition is losing €100 per hectare per year in production terms. A sward containing 40% is losing €200 per year and 25% is losing €230 per year.

Reseeding is currently one of the best farm investments you can make at present.

Grass seed- The Common Pitfalls:

Unfortunately many just buy a bag of grass seed and don't fully understand the importance of what the bag contains. There are huge differences throughout varieties and thankfully we now have a Grass Pasture Profit Index (PPI) system produced by Dept of Ag and Teagasc which is derived from the familiar EBI list.

It means that in order to buy grass seed you need to study the list and see how highly ranked the varieties are on the bag.

It is important to note that if a variety is not on the PPI list it should not be sown.

We are fortunate to stock only top-class Grass seeds which come from the top plant breeders in the world and therefore bring you varieties that have the highest ranking on the PPI list & deliver you the greatest gains, yields & profits.

We appeal to you to study the list and see for yourself. Just because a bag of seed is €5 cheaper may not mean its value for money. If it grows you 1 tonne of grass dry matter less than other varieties over the next 7 to 10 years, you will have lost out on 7 to 10 ton of dry matter or €1127 to €1610/ha!

See listed below, our Grass seed mixtures, please rate these mixes on the PPI list which you can find on the Teagasc website and compare with competitor mixes.

 Grass mixes	Mix Composition
Sweet Tooth- Probably the best grazing mixture available in Ireland	2.5kg Abergain 4kg Aberchoice 2kg Dunluce 2.5kg Tyrella 0.5kg Clover
Goldtooth- Specifically formulated to deliver a high yielding cut of silage followed by intensive grazing	2kg Kintyre 2kg Dunluce 4.5kg Drumbo 2.5kg Tyrella 0.5kg Clover
Two cut silage- Formulated to deliver longevity and consistent quality. Designed to deliver outstanding yields of silage.	2kg Seogoe 2kg Dunluce 3kg Clanrye 4.5kg Abermagic
Heavy/Peaty Designed for wet and reclaimed land. Renowned for persistence under heavy/moist conditions.	2kg Navan 4.5kg Clanrye 4.5kg Drumbo 0.5kg Clover

Dairying-Low Milk Protein

Cows are approaching peak and energy deficits in the diet can become a problem. Milk protein % is directly related to energy intake.

High energy diet = High milk protein.

Low energy diet = low milk protein.

Milk protein% below 3.1% indicates energy deficit.

Over-estimating grass allowance and not taking into consideration variations in grass dry matter from day-to-day can often result in low energy intakes. Aim to graze grass at the right covers (no more than 1400kgs DM/Ha). Concentrate supplement levels should be increased in times of low grass growth or wet weather.

Sheep:

Managing ewes & lambs on tight grass supplies:

Cold and wet weather conditions this spring continue to cause problems on many sheep farms with grass supplies tight and grass growth behind normal. In many cases fertiliser applications have been delayed and it will be some time before grass recovers on many farms.

Forward grazing lambs ahead of ewes is one option that should be used when grass is in tight supply. This will improve lamb performance as it allows them priority access to the best quality grass before the ewes.

Fertiliser application: Where grass supplies are tight and grass growth is poor, fertiliser should be applied. The amount of fertiliser being applied will depend on the stocking rate of the farm. Farms stocked at 4 ewes/acre or more should apply a minimum of 30 units of nitrogen per acre by mid-April. Where soil P & K levels are low a compound fertiliser should be used rather than CAN.

Calf Rearing: It's a critical stage

Lot of scientific data emerging which states that the way you feed pre-weaning calves has a massive influence on their lifetime production, be it milk volume or carcass weight.

For instance, calves fed 1300grams of (Lifestart approved) milk powder versus 600grams/day show the following differences at 54days of age:

Liveweight difference of 20kg

Mammary gland weight of 337grams versus 75grams.

The calves fed on the higher plain of nutrition also displayed much earlier onset of puberty (in the region of 30-40days earlier). Regarding dairy heifers the advantages of the higher plain of nutrition meant an increase of between 635 to 1400lt of milk in the 1st lactation, largely because of the animals larger intake ability due to a much better rearing as a calf.

Other trial data has proved that underfed calves in the 1st 6months have very little compensatory growth ability.


The research has also highlighted many other important husbandry factors listed below:

Comfort: the calf rearing environment should be clean, bright, soft and well ventilated. Straw is key to comfort and lots of it. The bed of straw should be good enough for you to ly in yourself!! If not how is a young calf supposed to thrive and be comfortable??

Consistency: a large number of studies have established the importance of adhering to a regular feeding schedule.

Colostrum: New borns should receive 4 litres of high quality colostrum within the first 6 hours of life

Calories: calves should receive 150 g/litre of

LifeStart approved calf milk replacer eg. 

Wonderthrive Milk Replacer

Crops: Be patient, weather will come!

Majority of spring crops still to be sown. Its important to only sow into very good conditions for late sown crops, let soils dry, till properly and firm seedbed properly after sowing. Now too late to sow oats or wheat. All the common barley varieties still available in 500kg & 50kg bags. (Sanette, Propino, Irina & Mickle).

Winter Crops:



Barley crops are variable and some got substantial setbacks during winter and remain quite thin, but with favourable weather and good husbandry they still have potential.

Some fabulous looking **wheat** crops which prove wheat can handle wet winters way better than barley. Has moved through stages almost as normal during the very late and harsh spring.

All winter crops require urgent attention at present. All need their main split of nitrogen now. Many still not done for weeds, so these must be cleared up asap as canopies are nearly closed in. Barley urgently needs 1st fung and growth reg as lot of rhynco in base which will spiral out of control when temperatures rise if not controlled. Similiarly with wheat, lots of septoria in base, all ready to explode when temperatures rise. Most wheat crops approaching T1 spray, so use robust rates of good chemistry. Septoria now becoming a great challenge so don't delay or skimp on fungicides.

Fodder Crops: Beet, maize etc. Time to sow these crops now, but remember if you are producing these crops for sale, make sure you have a guaranteed market for them. As usual all the leading varieties for these crops in stock, along with all the husbandry inputs you will require.

For all your crop needs and for all your grass weed solutions call into any of our branches where you can avail of all the best and up to date advice from our team.



REMEMBER- IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY!