

Living And Working In Your Community

April 2022

Our Team



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Hello and welcome to the April Newsletter. Spring has sprung! Now we could do with a drop of rain..... I hope this good weather continues for all of you lambing in April.

We have been busy with lambing – the lambing table has been used a lot, with a few queues forming. It really does save your back, and has been excellent during COVID, allowing us to pick up and handle the ewe single handed.

We have also been busy with TB testing – you are of course keen to get your annual tests done while the animals are still housed, and many of you are doing pre-movement tests. We have had a few people phone up at the eleventh hour to fit in a whole herd test – I know I’ve said it before, but please give us as much notice as possible. Also, if you would like us to do any extras at your test like PDs, dehorning etc, please again let us know as soon as possible so that we can get our equipment organised.

We are open as normal on Good Friday but closed on Easter Monday.

Reminder. If you have an IR at your TB test – any type of TB test – you will be shut down until the IR is re-tested (and passes) at least 60 days later. This came into force mid January and is giving some clients a nasty surprise. Many clients have done a small pre-movement test ahead of their whole herd test.

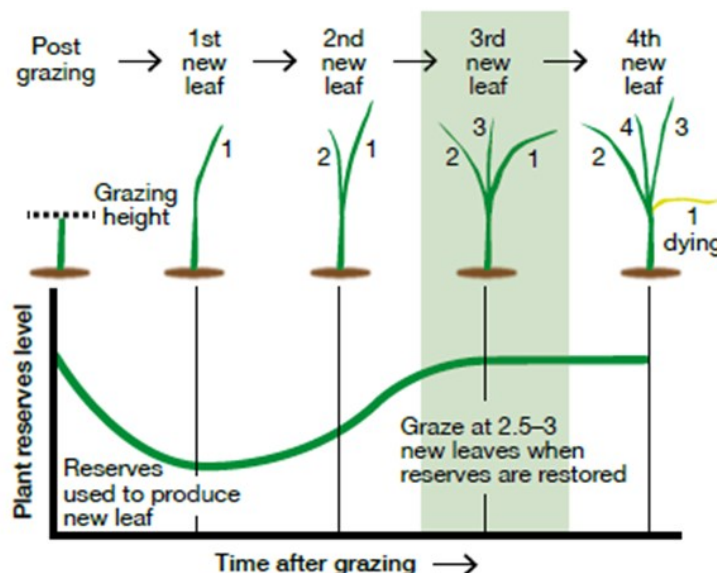
We wish you all a Happy Easter.

Mary

Lets talk about grass

Grass, even today, remains the cheapest feed on the farm. Between grazing and silage it can provide nearly all the energy requirements for most beef and sheep systems. However, on some farms, wasted grass can approach 50% of the total crop grown, which in turn presents an opportunity for either cost savings or improved performance.

How does grass grow?



Our common grasses have evolved to have growing points near ground level that respond quickly to being grazed. However, most grass plants will only ever have three live leaves, meaning that as the fourth leaf grows, the oldest is already dying back. At peak growth in May, a new leaf can appear every 4-5 days, and the ideal time for grazing is when grass is at the 3 leaf stage.

Figure 1: The grass plant leaf life cycle



Sian Fuller

Obviously, grass growth varies throughout the year and it is also affected by grass species, soil temperature, light, water, nutrients etc. Typically, highest growth is seen in May with a second peak in early September.

One important point to note from figure 1 is the need of the grass plant to use some of its reserves to generate a new leaf. This becomes important when fields are over-grazed as the plant will then be slow to recover, reducing total grass yields – think “grass grows grass”.

Grazing systems and grass recovery

Set stocked grazing, with limited control over sward heights, will typically result in 50% of the grass grown being used by the stock. Clearly, for some farms this is inevitable e.g. turning stock out onto common grazing.

Using rotational grazing, or going for the full paddock system improves grass utilisation (less waste), grass quality (less dead leaves so more energy) and grass quantity (fields can be rested and allowed to recover). For some farms, these systems may require additional fencing, or water troughs but any investment is soon returned by the increased productivity of the grass land.

Making the most of grass

To make the most of grassland means measuring grass cover on different fields, to plan where stock will go next. For the purists, plate meters are available, which measure compressed sward height and convert back to kg DM/ha (kilograms of dry matter per hectare). However, stealing a ruler from the kids’ school pencil case will do a similar job for a bit less money.

To check sward height place the end of the ruler on the ground, and measure the highest grass or clover plant.



Dom Day



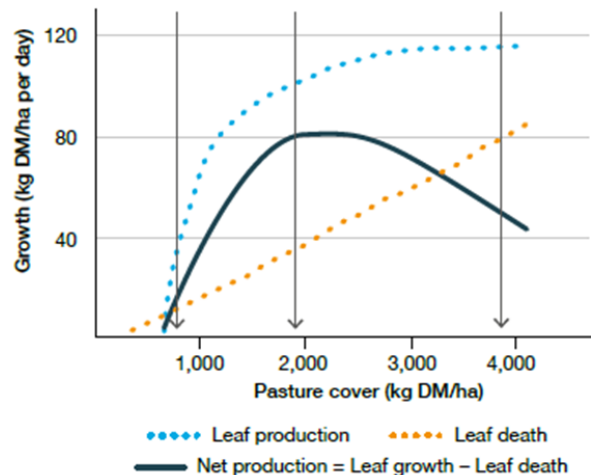
Jimmy Jackson



Sian Lloyd



A sward stick (or ruler) in action – height 11cm



Growth growth relates to pasture cover

Target sward heights vary by species. For sheep, begin grazing with 8-10cm cover, and then move to the next field when residuals are down to around 5cm. For finishing lambs in the autumn, these figures should be increased by 2cm.

For cattle, the pre-grazing cover is 12-14cm, with 6cm residuals early in the year, rising to 8cm by autumn. Growing cattle can be turned in with a pre-grazing cover of 10cm, to benefit from the younger, more energy rich plant.

Farms on paddock grazing systems will often use higher initial covers, as the stock are grazed more intensively for less time.

Controlling sward heights is vital to get the maximum grass quantity and quality, as the aim is for young leafy fast growing grass. Very short swards will suffer reduced growth (by up to 85%) as the plant has to use its reserves to generate new leaves, whilst over long swards have increased leaf death, blocking light and reducing growth and quality. Ideal growth is at 2,000 to 2,500 kgDM/ha, which coincidentally is a sward height of 8-12cm.

Taking multiple (ideally 30) measurements per field will give a good average cover.

Full details on sward heights, pasture cover, grazing strategies and planning ahead are available in the AHDB Planning grazing strategies for Better Returns booklet, available on the web.



Helen Dando



Tracey Huntley