

## What can we learn from others?

The [Ulster Grassland Society](#) Annual Conference was held in Belfast on 27 January. The speakers included Dr Michael O'Donovan and Adam Woods from [Teagasc](#) (agriculture and food development authority in Ireland) and the theme of the conference was how to exploit the potential of grass.

The incoming president David Johnston, a grass breeder from [AFBI Loughgall](#), suggested that Northern Ireland (NI) is not currently maximising its potential for grass growth. Comparing results from various trial sites in the UK showed that NI has fewer pests and less disease than other sites. He believes that the development of high yielding varieties with good quality traits needs to be exploited. New varieties of hybrid and Italian ryegrasses and timothy have the potential to produce 20, 22 and 15 tonnes of dry matter per hectare respectively.



Michael O'Donovan discussed the targets for the Irish dairy industry – 90 per cent of feed to be home grown, environmentally efficient, 285 day lactations and 1,250 kg milk solids per hectare. It is clear that the cow type and stocking rate needs to be fitted to the farm, as the target is to have 0.5 to 0.75 tonnes of supplement per cow.

They've found that good farms have high soil fertility, measure grass regularly, have low variation between the performance of paddocks, use spring grazing well, ensure all paddocks contribute, have more grazing's per farm and re-seed.



Manager of the [BETTER Farm Beef Programme](#), Adam Woods, discussed his experiences of trying to get Irish beef farmers to exploit their competitive advantage. He suggested that it is easy to buy concentrates and to have low stocking rates. The first steps included adjusting soil fertility, investing in fences and drinkers and to walk the farm weekly. They are working on the overall target of having 240 days or more at grass. A shift towards paddock grazing has meant more grass is being grown which means that the grazing season can be extended.

Adam said it is about growing grass for three weeks, eating it in three days with the target pre-graze heights of 10 cm to 4 cm. It is important to completely clean out in the first rotation, perhaps with weaned calves, to

### Speakers at the conference

avoid stem production. He proposed that the re-seeding of poorly performing fields will pay but only when stocking rates are high enough to ensure it is fully utilised.