

Beef from Grass

Autumn grazing

Matt Pilkington is one of the mentors for the Beef from Grass project. Along with his parents, he runs Pilkington Farms Ltd, situated at Church Farm, Warwickshire. The enterprise is comprised of 340ha, with 28ha used for growing maize and the rest grass. Matt currently has 600 New Zealand Friesian dairy cows which are split equally between spring and autumn calving, plus 500 followers.

The cows produce 6,700 litres of milk per lactation, with 4,600 litres coming from forage. This equates to 560kg of milk solids per cow (based on 4.6% butterfat and 3.65% protein) and the high-constituent content suits the current milk contract.

The autumn grazing planner is an essential part of Matt's business, particularly with the current low milk price and the requirement for Matt to cut the costs of production. With grass costing six to eight pence per kg of dry matter (DM), compared to over 20 pence for concentrates, it is essential that grass utilisation is maximised throughout the year.

Grazing management

Planning autumn grazing is probably one of the most important aspects of the grazing calendar. From this point, the aim is to increase the number of days at grass while maintaining animal performance. The final rotation should prepare the grazing platform for the following spring by removing any waste grass and allowing the build-up of a wedge.

Building up grass covers should start from the middle of August, with grazing rounds increasing to 25 – 30 days and then 35 – 40 days in late September. As well as this, it may be necessary to apply 125kg/ha of ammonium nitrate, depending on stocking rate. This will then provide the farm with its largest amount of grass of the year for the last round of grazing (cover of 2,500kg DM/ha across the farm)

Autumn planner

The autumn planner is a way of budgeting grass for the remaining grazing period before housing cattle. An autumn plan developed in Ireland relies on 60% of a farm being grazed in October and the remaining 40% being grazed during November. Fields with the highest covers (3,500kg DM/ha) should be grazed first. Fields should be shut off from around 10 October, with wetter farms starting ten days earlier. Research from Teagasc has shown that for every day closing is delayed after 15 October, spring grass supply reduces by 15kg DM/ha. Average closing cover across a farm should be in the region of 1,800kg DM/ha, with residuals taken down to between 1,500 and 1,600kg DM/ha.



Table 1 shows how a 100ha farm could be split up on a week by week basis to efficiently graze the whole farm and allow a wedge of grass to start building for the spring. Fields shut off in the week of the 10 to the 17 October will be grazed first in the spring. With this system, stock can either be housed gradually over the period as the grass area to be grazed reduces or fed silage or concentrates in the field.

As we move into autumn, good management of fields during wet weather is essential to allow the system to be fully utilised. This may involve the on/off grazing of cattle, the movement of cattle daily or the use of multiple entrances to fields. The investment of tracks can greatly aid management of fields during this time.

Table 1: Example of an autumn grazing planner for a 100ha farm

Week	Grazing area (ha) per week	Grazing area (ha) total
10 – 17 Oct	17.5	17.5
17 – 24 Oct	17.5	35
24 – 31 Oct	17.5	52.5
31 – 7 Nov	17.5	70
7 – 14 Nov	10	80
14 – 21 Nov	10	90
21 – 28 Nov	10	100

For more information see the BRP manual

[Planning Grazing Strategies for Better Returns](#)