

## MAINTAINING GRAZING QUALITY IS THE KEY

	Growth rate kgDM/ ha/day	DM (%)	D Value (%)	Protein (%)	ME MJ/kg DM	Sugar (%) in Fresh weight	Nitrate N (%) in fresh weight
Shottle (Derbyshire)	55	15.3	74	24.4	11.7	1.3	0.05
Congleton (Cheshire)	84	19.5	75	28.3	11.9	1.5	0.25
Carlisle (Cumbria)							
Tutbury (Staffs)							
Blandford (Dorset)	53	20.3	75	27.7	12.0	1.8	0.05
Redhill (Surrey)							
Dumfries (Ayrshire)	40	15.0	72	24.3	11.4	1.2	0.05
Launceston (Cornwall)	49	17.0	74	22.3	11.8	1.6	0.03

**Promar Regional Consultant David Burns considers what actions farmers should be taking to make the most of grazing during July and early August.**

In that peaceful lull between first and second cut it may seem odd to be talking about late July grazing management, but if the last few years are anything to go by it will make sense to get plans in place now.

Although the results from our contributors around the country show that grass quality is holding up well with good 'D' values, growth rates are more variable. This is likely to remain the case especially if we get another long, dry spell as has been the case in recent years.

The aims with mid-summer grazing management are to maintain a good supply of good quality grazing and to maintain yields from forage during the July – August period. Nitrogen applications in the next few days will be crucial. Most of the country is forecast some rain so use the opportunity to make sure all grazing has been top dressed.

The key to maintaining grass quality is to give grass a chance to recover and this will mean not grazing new growth too tightly and allowing a sensible break between grazings to allow an adequate ratio of leaf to stem to develop.

If grazing is tight and growth rates are declining, consider strip grazing a silage field but remember to use a back-fence to preserve the new growth. Graze with high yielders first and then follow on with lower yielders or dry stock. But remember, adding young leafy aftermaths to generally good quality grazing is a recipe for low butterfats. If you can accept a slightly lower price then it is probably not worth worrying about. If you need to keep butterfat up to avoid penalty payments then consider buffer feeding with hay or big bale silage.

It's also worth doing something about rejected grass. Walking grazing fields it is not unusual to see up to 20% of the area covered in stemmy old grass. Unless you do something about it, this grazing is lost for the rest of the season. The aim must be to replace the old grass with young leafy material as soon as possible. Topping is the best way to remove the old material, done as soon as you can, certainly by the end of June and cut as low as possible.

Regardless of the moves made to improve grazing supply, it is likely that farmers will need to think seriously about buffer feeding, especially with fresh calved cows. It will be important to choose the correct type of buffer, grass silage is definitely the worst product to use unless cows are very short of grazing as it has the highest substitution rate. In other words grass silage just replaces grass rather than being an addition to it. Good buffer feeds have low substitution rates and include maize silage and good quality hay.

It may pay to split the herd, keeping fresh calved cows and high yielders on the best quality grass and feeding lower quality material to low yielders. Late lactation cows eating 14kgDM of grass should be expected to produce M+16 litres.

Finally don't forget water. If it is hot, then cows demand for drinking water will increase greatly. Check troughs are clean and filling quickly and add extra troughs if needs be. Cows won't generally walk a long way for water without it having an impact on grazing intakes and milk yields.