

MANAGING INTRODUCTION OF AFTERMATHS

	Growth rate kgDM/ ha/day	DM (%)	D Value (%)	Protein (%)	ME MJ/kg DM	Sugar (%) in Fresh weight	Nitrate N (%) in fresh weight
Frank Wright National Average		19.0		19.6	11.9	1.96	0.01

With first cut silage delayed in many parts of the county and with low grazing growth rates, Promar International Senior Consultant Andrew Hawkins considers the implications for grazing management.

Across the country growth rates on grazing fields have been consistently below normal this season although the recent rain and promised higher temperatures should prompt a rapid change. At the same time silage cuts have been held back on many farms which will reduce the speed with which aftermaths can be introduced into grazing rotations.

Grass quality remains good although this is the first week when ME levels have been below 12MJ. Protein is low as are free nitrates but this is good news for the cow as it will help reduce the excess protein available from the grass. However balancing grass with cereals for rumen degradable energy will still be important.

With low growth rates it is even more important to monitor grazing use and maintain grass quality. The objective should be to maintain a dense, leafy pasture with few if any stems and seed heads. Turn cows in at around 12cm which is equivalent to a cover of 2700kgDM/ha and take them out when 90% of the sward is 6cm high. Avoid grazing too tight as this will delay regrowth.

If available grass covers are low then using maize or wholecrop silage as a buffer feed is preferable to grazing fields initially shut up for silage as this grass will be lower quality due to the advanced growth stage. If there is no option but to graze silage fields, then use long narrow strips and consider a leader follower system to ensure grass is grazed down tight, essential if future quality is to be maintained.

Hopefully most farmers will be able to look forward to including first cut aftermaths into the grazing rotation soon. To assist this it is vital to get fertiliser on as soon as possible after the silage has been picked up.

Don't be tempted to move into aftermaths too soon. The grass needs to have reached the three leaf stage before it is grazed as this allows the plant to put energy down into the root system which will help ensure faster regrowth throughout the season.

Taking grass off before it reaches the three leaf stage will reduce total growth. For the same reason avoid using cows to 'tidy up' silage fields destined for second cut as they will graze short fresh grass in preference to old stemmy material and reduce future cuts.

Even if grazing fields have low covers avoid grazing too high a proportion of first cut aftermaths as although this might help with short term grazing supply, there is a risk that you will end up with a grazing rotation longer than three weeks once growth rates recover. Long rotations are associated with poorer quality grazing and increased rejection.

If grass availability is a problem then buffer feeding is a better option as the amount of buffer can be reduced as growth improves.