Grazing and forage year planner

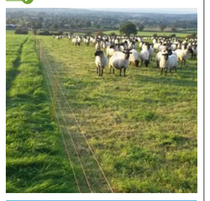
Get the most you can from grazed grass and silages. Use this beef and lamb year planner to make sure you are doing the right jobs at the right time. Fill in the dates and tick off the tasks once completed.

January

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Fencing, tracks and water troughs MOT to be carried out before turnout



Task 2

- [ ] DATE Analyse borehole water

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Finalise spring rotation planner

Notes

February

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE First spring rotation should be around 4–50 days from the end of February
- [ ] DATE Capitalise on grazed grass by turning out to pasture as soon as possible

Cattle enter covers around 2,400–2,600 kg DM/ha

Ewes enter covers around 2,300–2,500 kg DM/ha

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Achieve target residuals of 1,500 kg DM/ha at the start of the season

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Soil sample 25% of the farm (rotating to ensure each field is sampled every 4 years)

Task 4

- [ ] DATE Aim for 30% of the grazing platform to be grazed by the end of February

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Begin nutrient applications for grass, as per nutrient management plan and in line with NVZ's regulations

Research has shown that achieving an extra day at grass for a 100-suckler-cow herd is worth, on average, £125 per day

Notes

March

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Wait until soil temperatures rise to 5–6°C for five consecutive days before applying nitrogen fertiliser
- [ ] DATE In a wet spring, reduce paddocks to one-day or 12-hour paddocks, turning priority stock out first. They will make the most economic use of grass

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Aim to graze 60% of the platform by 20 March

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Ensure livestock magnesium requirements are met to prevent grass staggers

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Discuss your requirements and expectations and agree a price for silage-making with your contractor

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Review silage budget for this cropping year and reconcile with silage requirements for the next 12 months

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Roll silage fields if necessary

Notes

April

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Aim to complete first rotation (100% grazed) 7 days before magic day

Task 2

- [ ] DATE For GB farms, magic day normally arrives between 4 and 20 April. Make a note of when grass supply matches grass demand on your farm for future reference

Task 3

- [ ] DATE After magic day you will need to shift from managing a deficit to dealing with a surplus

Task 4

- [ ] DATE Assess clover content and adjust fertiliser applications accordingly

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Prepare clamps for first cut. Maintain bale stacking site – need a firm, level and free-draining base. If vermin are a problem check your net is free from damage

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Drill forage maize and apply nutrients, as per nutrient management plan

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Aim to take first cut in early May – analyse grass for nitrates and sugars pre-cutting to achieve high quality

Notes

May

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Reduce rotation length depending on grass growth rates, usually between 18 and 21 days

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Have a dry weather management contingency plan in place to minimise the effect on forage stocks and livestock performance

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Prepare a silage budget for this cropping year and reconcile with silage requirements for the next 12 months

Top tip:

Bales within the stack retain their quality better than bales on the outside, so place the best silage within the stack

Notes

June

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Measure grass twice a week when grass growth rates hit 75 kg DM/ha

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Remove grass surplus as silage. Do not wait to bulk up; focus on the feed supply and quality in the next grazing round

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Estimate the quantity of silage required for the next 12 months

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Develop a cropping strategy to produce sufficient silage to meet estimated requirements for the next 12 months

Notes

July

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Monitor grazing to ensure residuals are consistently met and that wastage does not build up in the bottom of the sward

Task 2

- [ ] DATE In a hot summer, consider the implications of heat stress on your stock and have a 'plan B' to reduce exposure

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Prepare clamps for wholecrop silage

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Keep an eye on cereal crop ripeness, if harvesting as fermented wholecrop

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Aim to take second cut 30–35 days after first cut

Task 4

- [ ] DATE Aim to take third cut 30–35 days after second cut

Notes

August

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE The next grazing season starts now with managing autumn pastures
- [ ] DATE Finalise your autumn rotation planner

Task 2

- [ ] DATE 'Clean out month' and time to ensure pastures are grazed down to target residual – 1,500 kg DM/ha

Task 3

- [ ] DATE All grass wintering – as a general rule of thumb the farm grass cover should average at 2,000–2,500 kg DM/ha before the winter system commences. Calculate a winter feed budget to understand how the grass supply will meet the flock demand over the period

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Review grass silage yields and reseed where necessary to improve sward quality

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Prepare clamps for maize silage

As a guide:

Cattle should not enter covers higher than 3,000 kg DM/ha

Ewes should not enter covers higher than 2,500 kg DM/ha and lambs no higher than 2,400 kg DM/ha

Notes

September

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Highest average farm cover (AFC) should be achieved in mid-to-late September, with a rotation length of more than 35 days from mid-September

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Assess water flow, trough size and fences – make required improvements

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Apply lime in accordance with your most recent soil pH results. If your analysis is over four years old, retest soil

Closed period for applying manufactured nitrogen fertilisers starts 15 September for grassland across all soil types until 15 January in NVZs

Closed period for applying organic manure with readily available nitrogen content (e.g. slurry, poultry manures) on shallow or sandy soils starts 1 September for grassland in NVZs

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Keep an eye on maize crop ripeness to harvest at optimum dry matter

Task 2

- [ ] DATE When all silage is harvested, review the silage budget for this cropping year and reconcile with silage requirements for the next 12 months

Task 3

- [ ] DATE Sample silages for analysis and formulate rations

Notes

October

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Start last rotation around 5–10 October and aim to graze and close 60% of the platform in October
- [ ] DATE Graze all covers >3,000 kg DM/ha in October, especially on wet farms
- [ ] DATE Use back fencing if needed to reduce poaching

Closed period for applying organic manure with readily available nitrogen content (e.g. slurry, poultry manures) on all other soil types, apart from shallow or sandy soils, starts 15 October for grassland in NVZs

Silage tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Review silage yields and quality analysis and identify possible areas for improvement next season

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Soil sample any fields not sampled within the last 3–4 years and develop a nutrient management plan for the following growing season

Notes

November

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Aim to graze the remaining 40% of the platform and finish the last rotation by 15–20 November

Task 2

- [ ] DATE Target closing AFC at housing should be around 2,150–2,230 kg DM/ha on 20 November

Notes

December

Grazing tasks

Task 1

- [ ] DATE Conduct annual tonnage report and set targets for following year and identify paddocks for improvement

Notes

It's recommended to set stock ewes and lambs until at least 3 weeks of age to avoid confusion

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