

Maximising grass availability for beef cattle



Improving the quality and availability of grass is the focus of a beef grazing project at Cilrhue Farm, Boncath. Owned and managed by Mrs BH Davies and her sons John and Edward Davies, the farm extends to 214 acres of owned land and an additional 93 acres of rented land. The farm is predominantly grassland with approximately 20 acres

of wholecrop grown in the summer. There are approximately 650 cattle reared on the farm, bought as calves in batches in the Spring and Autumn and reared through to finishing. There are three main breed types; Friesian, Dairy Shorthorn and Hereford crosses.

The aim of the project, which is managed by Nigel Howells Grass Management Consultancy Ltd, is to measure how much grass is available and plan the grazing strategy to make the most of what is available. Measurements have been taken every two weeks since early March (weekly during May) using a plate meter and recorded. At the beginning of the project paddocks were established using temporary electric fencing to enable the paddocks to be grazed rotationally. This allows grass to be grazed when it is of optimum quality and if grass growth exceeds what is required paddocks can be closed off and taken as a silage crop.

The table below shows the grass growth from two of the paddocks alongside the average for the farm.

Date of measurement	Paddock Growth kgDM/ha		
	Fron B	Croft A	Farm Average
26/3/14	21	33	9
8/4/14	26	71	32
22/4/14	34	80	42
6/5/14	98	83	76
14/5/14	75	73	50
21/5/14	102	93	95
27/5/14	141	85	63
3/6/14	70	60	36
18/6/14	71	42	44
2/7/14	60	46	32
17/7/14	35	55	45
25/7/14	91	128	90
6/8/14	60	48	31
Total grass to date tDM/ha	7.5	9.1	6.4

Fertiliser applications were;

23 units/ acre of nitrogen (in the form of urea) in mid March

3000 gallons/acre of slurry in early April

Fron B was injected with liquid nitrogen (200 units per acre) in late April

Croft A has received 2 applications of Humber 18 (40 units per acre)



Throughout the farm the swards are of different ages and productivity but the use of wholecrop provides the opportunity for regular reseeding. Fron B was slot seeded last autumn with a late heading Perennial Ryegrass to boost productivity.

First cut silage was made in mid June and due to the better management an area 20% greater than previous years was cut despite having the same number of stock. This is one of the benefits of rotationally grazing paddocks as areas can be brought in and out of the rotation depending on grass growth.

As well as monitoring grass growth the cattle liveweight gains have also been monitored to provide an indicator of feed supply and quality. The cattle are kept in groups depending on their age and so far this summer all have been achieving daily liveweight gains in excess of 1kg/head/day off grass.



Historically as the animals mature they have been brought indoors and finished off silage and concentrates but the aim now is to finish as many as possible off grass, preserving silage stocks for winter housed cattle. Regular weight recording will show whether this is working or whether some animals need to be supplemented with concentrates to finish. In addition John and Edward would like to extend the grazing season and outwinter as many stock as possible. This will be made possible by keeping the quality of the grass as high as possible into the autumn through careful grazing management while avoiding damage to the swards to allow as early a turnout as possible.



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