

## Grazing

Sept 20



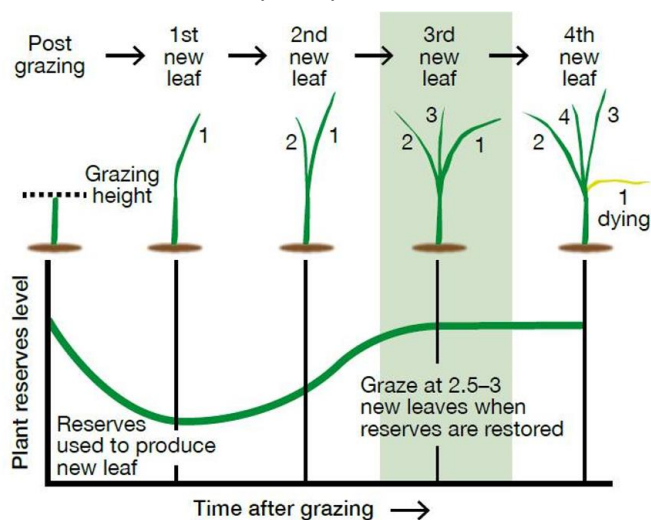
After a recent clinical club presented by Ed for the vets, we felt it would be a good time to have a quick recap of this important farming topic.

There is a plethora of options when it comes to grazing – from what you are offering your stock to graze, to the way in which you rotate them around your land.

Whilst a single newsletter barely scratches the surface of grassland management, we will briefly discuss the systems of monoculture vs herbal leys, and rotational vs mob grazing. We hope that some of you may find it useful, especially if you feel that your current system isn't quite providing what you want it to.

### Grass monoculture

Ryegrass is the main grass grown on farms across our practice. It consistently grows 3 leaves. As the fourth grows, the first dies back. This pattern dictates the way in which it should be grazed as the first leaf is grown using energy from the root and seed. The subsequent leaves are produced using the energy from the first leaf. The third leaf provides 55% of the leaf area, and its growth indicates the ideal time for the paddock to be grazed – before seeds are produced. This happens when the plant becomes stressed, or as late May/early June arrives.



It is important that grass is grazed down low enough so that what is left (the 'residual') grows back a healthy, palatable stalk. Otherwise this part of the plant becomes tough and cows will avoid it. Mowing is one option (topping will not take the plant low enough). Regrowth takes between 15 days in spring and up to 40 days in summer to get back to grazing levels. We should therefore aim to leave cows on pasture for no more than 3 days in the spring as they will naturally choose to regrazed the new fresher shoots coming through which stops the plant recovering properly. 1 week on pasture later in the Summer is acceptable, but it's important to monitor the grass as you go as the figures are definitely a rule of thumb, and every field can be different!

Monocultures such as ryegrass have been used successfully for many years, however the roots are very shallow, which has some disadvantages, e.g. drought. On average, 1 in 5 years is a drought year. Ryegrass has a poor tolerance to drought due to its shallow roots, however it recovers very quickly and is one of the first plants to produce grazing. Increasingly, farmers are choosing to plant crops with deeper roots which have several benefits.

### Herbal leys

Introducing a mixture of plants in the form of a herbal ley is often seen as a return to a style of farming which focuses on soil health. There are several areas which are known to benefit from this style of farming:

- Nitrogen fixing, reducing the need for fertiliser
- Mineral extraction from the soil and availability for stock
- Drought resistance
- Worm control due to the tannins contained in plants such as sainfoin and chicory

- Increased yield when different species grown together rather than as a monoculture due to overlapping growth habits and patterns
- Carbon capture
- Increased wildlife habitat

There are about 20 species of plants which can be employed in herbal ley, very much depending on what kind of soil and system the land already has, and what the desired output is.

### **Set stocking**

This is where the stock has free access to all areas of a field throughout the grazing season. It is the simplest form of grazing management, however, is also the least effective. The cattle become selective feeders, grazing mostly on young leaves, leaving some grass to become wasted. The cow will have to work harder to achieve maximum intake as the grass is shorter therefore less grass per bite. However, fencing and water troughs are easier to manage, and the sward is usually rich in clover. Some of our farmers use a similar version of set stocking known as Block Grazing.

### **Rotational grazing**

Rotational grazing is a 'graze and rest' principle, which supposedly grows 20% more grass due to a rest period allowing the leaves to regrow. The aim is to improve the grass quality, increase animal performance, extend the grazing period and better grass budgeting.

### **Mob grazing**

Mob grazing (also known as tall grass grazing) is short duration, high density grazing. This is a more intensive rotational grazing. It is essentially the opposite of set stocking and is a big change for those who have always grazed cattle on young leaves. The idea is that the grass is left to recover for long periods at a time, therefore uses less of the energy stored in the roots to regrow, which eventually run out and grass dies if cattle are left to regrazed the same area for long enough.

Mob grazing is being used more on organic farms to extend the grazing period.

The benefits include soil health, biodiversity, nutritional diversity for the cattle, and less money spent on fertilizer, feed and labour. The challenges would be the labour involved in fencing, water supply to the cattle, judging how big to make the paddocks and how long to leave cattle on.

**We hope that this has been a somewhat interesting whistle-stop tour of grassland management. There is far too much to fit into a single newsletter, therefore if there are any questions or comments then please let us know!**

### **Ringvac Production Ceasing**

We have been informed that production of Ringvac is stopping for an unknown length of time. We have access to product that expires 31/12/2020. If you would like to reserve some of this before it disappears please contact Bridget in dispensary.

Grace and Ed are hoping to get the sustainability group up and running again once Covid restrictions allow it. We hope to have plenty of lively discussion about grazing amongst other things and would love your input if you have or would like to develop an interest. Please get in touch to let us know if you'd like to be involved if you haven't done already.

Hopefully, you are all enjoying what seems to be the last of the summer. Autumn seems to be on the way – it might even be time to swap the sunhats for a woolly soon!

***Congratulations to Georgie and Stu on the birth of their daughter Poppy Elizabeth Nixon, on 26<sup>th</sup> August.***

**Best wishes, Grace and Lucy.**

