FORAGE *for* PROFIT

Farm Advisory Service

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The Forage for Profit Discussion Group are a group of beef and sheep producers based in South West Scotland with a common desire to improve business profitability through improved utilisation of grass and forage crops.

September Update — Temperatures are following seasonal expectations however soil temperatures have held and averaged 11 degrees for the month. Grasscheck information shows that the average grass growth/day for September showed a difference of 20kg between dairy farms and beef farms with dairy farms averaging 48.3kg DM/ha/day and beef and sheep 28.8kg.. See graph below from GrassCheck GB demonstrating the UK growth curve to date. a useful tool to maintain quality for the rest of the season. The dry matter content of grass is lower with the wetter conditions so intake of grass will have to be greater to satisfy animal demand.

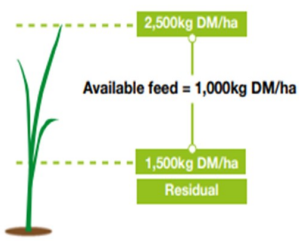
Feed Budgeting

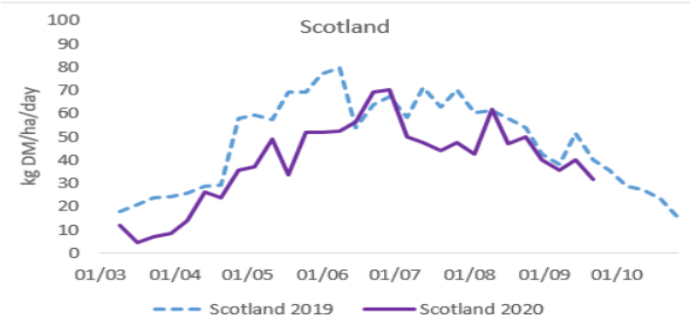
Feed budgets can be used in a variety of situations. A feed budget will help to:

- identify any opportunities due to surplus fodder
- Identify feed deficits which may have a negative impact on the business.

The feed budget should take account of all feed available on farm such as baled silage, pit silage, homegrown straw but should also take an account of the demand from livestock for that feed. A guide sheet can be found here https://www.fas.scot/downloads/feed-budgeting/ .

Feed Budgets can also be used to budget grass for the winter when better utilisation of grass can save costs on purchased feed. Demand from stock grazing needs to be calculated and then calculate available grass by deducting residual grass height from total grass height. See https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/planning-grazing-strategies-for-better-returns





Source: www.grasscheckgb.co.uk

Soil Sampling

Regular soil sampling enables accurate recommendations to be made based on nutrient levels in the soil. Cropping, weather, yield fluctuations, organic manure applications all have an effect on available soil nutrients so sampling every 3 years is a good way to monitor the impact of your farming practices. A basic soil sample will cost approx. £12 and give you a measure of pH, P, K, Mg and Calcium. A broad Spectrum analysis will cost closer to £35 but will give you soil levels on trace elements such as copper, cobalt, selenium etc. A broad spectrum sample is useful is you feel a field is not performing as it should, if you are sowing a sensitive crop such as fodderbeet but also periodically to give an indication on any deficiencies which may affect animal health. Silage ground and fields with a new crop being sown could be sampled more regularly than grazing ground as there will be a greater requirement for nutrients.

For more information and events from the Farm Advisory Service see www.fas.scot or find us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @FasScot

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FORAGE *for* PROFIT — September Update

Setting up to Feed Out Forage Crops

Careful planning can help winter feeding of forage crops to run smoothly. The

- Ensure you have sufficient water supply easily accessible to livestock—preferably close to the feed face.
- Set out supplement bales early to prevent tractors going into field in winter and causing more damage to soil and erosion
- Check your power is sufficient and fence wires are in good condition
- If feeding out on a slope start at the top of hill and feed down to ensure crop captures any run off
- Fence off any sensitive wet areas to prevent water pollution and soil damage
- Back fence animals to minimise their access to bare soils
- Ensure stock have a lie back area or grass or stubble
- Plan to graze areas with more shelter later in winter when weather is worse
- Graze areas with heavier soils earlier in winter if its drier
- Measure your crop to allow preparation of a feed budget and ensure a high utilisation.

Importance of Potash

- Potash maintains the rigidity required to give plants structure and regulates the water content of the cells. A strong structured plant is essential to maximise the interception of sunlight for photosynthesis to occur and energy to be provided to the plant. Potash is related to the physiological conditions and stress the plant experiences – a shortage of Potash makes the plant susceptible to pests and disease, drought and frost.

Potash offtakes can be significant where silage and hay are removed. Typically 3.5 times more Potash is removed

- No more than **90kg/ha (70 units/acre)** should be applied at any one time for silage and care needs to be taken in Spring to prevent inducing staggers and issues at lambing/calving
- **Do not apply more than 15kg/Potash (12 units/ acre)** in Spring before grazing and apply with Nitrogen.

Nitrogen Uptake diminishes as grass growth slows so inorganic Nitrogen should not be applied after Mid August to avoid risk of N losses from soils. N from organic matter is mineralised in late Summer so any N required from plants should be available as organic N.

Autumn Fertiliser

Phosphate supply is finite so responsible management of the phosphate in our soils is essential.

- Phosphate is critical for root development in young plants. It is not mobile in the soil so applications of soluble phosphate from sources such as TSP are required to ensure the new roots can access the phosphate for energy to grow.
- Phosphate availability in the soil increases as pH increases so ensuring pH's are kept close to 6.5 will ensure the resource is available.
- Phosphate deficiency displays as purpling of leaves and depressed growth
- Phosphate availability reduces in cold weather so can appear deficient even though soil supply is sufficient
- Phosphate is extremely harmful to aquatics so prevent run off by applying in suitable conditions as close to growing season as possible and avoid spreading in wet conditions. The greatest source of runoff is from soil erosion so the use of grass buffer strips in any cropped areas can help minimise this.
- 95% of P and 80% of K in animal faeces is recycled so the requirement on grazing ground is low.
- Phosphate is best applied close the growing season due to risk of erosion over winter and plant uptake is greatest in warmer soils.