

Grass Growth and Quality

- The grass plots at Hillsborough remain covered in a blanket of snow, and so no grass was cut at Hillsborough or Greenmount again this week.
- However, the regional grass growth predictions below have been updated.
- The cold temperatures and the bitter easterly wind continues to keep grass growth at a standstill, with swards now visibly suffering from the persistent cold conditions.
- Unfortunately the weather forecast is showing little change from these conditions with overnight frosts remaining a feature of the weather throughout the first week of April, particularly for the west of the country.
- The long range weather forecast is however indicating a change to milder temperatures for the early part of next week.
- The long term average daily air temperature for late March is around 7°C, and temperatures have been around half of this throughout March across the country.
- The long term average grass growth for mid April is 50 kg DM/ha/day, and based on current weather forecasts, growth is going to be considerably less than this over the next two weeks.



Trevor and William Munnis manage a 220-cow Holstein herd near Ballymoney, Co. Antrim. The herd is mainly winter calving with cows calving from November onwards. There is a grazing platform of 41 ha available in spring increasing to around 49 ha after second cut silage. Annual rolling herd performance is 7,760 litres on 2.44 tonnes of concentrate – 2,392 litres from forage.



Grass supply

Average farm cover	1,650 kg DM/ha
Pre-grazing cover	2,300 kg DM/ha
7-day grass growth	0 kg DM/ha/day (based on farm cover)
Herd grass demand	n/a

Cow performance

Milk yield and quality	31.7 litres/cow/day, 4.17% BF, 3.28% PR
Milk from forage	9.5 litres/cow/day
Concentrate feed level	10.0 kg/cow/day

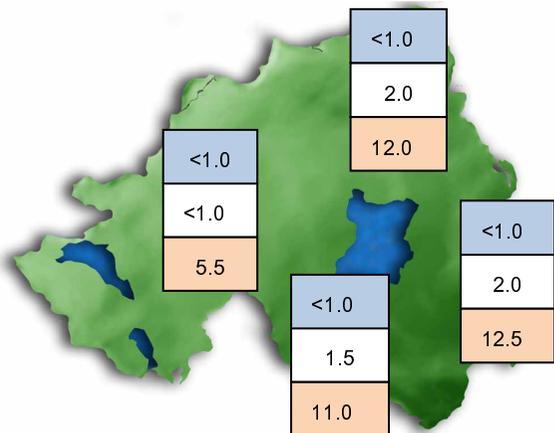
Management issues

Grass cover across the farm is particularly low as over half the grazing area is conacre ground which has been grazed by sheep over the winter. Average grass covers across the grazing area are over 500 kg DM/ha below normal for the time of year. With the poor predicted growth for the next fortnight, it is unlikely that there will be sufficient cover on the best paddocks to allow turn-out until after mid-April. Fortunately action was taken early in the winter to reduce silage use (early culling/stock sales) and there is still a months supply of first cut silage available.

Cows are managed in one group and fed a TMR of silage and 5 kg concentrate/cow allowing for maintenance + 22 litres of milk. A computerised feed to yield feeding system is used to provide additional concentrates for higher yielders. Daily feed levels at present are 0.33 kg/ litre of milk produced.

Allowing for the return of normal grass growth rates, it will be important to turn cows out onto lighter covers first to establish a grazing wedge so that the whole area is not at the ideal grazing stage at the same time. This will also allow a gradual change of diet with grazing time increased over a 7-10 day period.

Grass Growth Predictions (kg DM/ha/day)



Current
1 week ahead
2 weeks ahead

Comment: Predictions based on temperatures remaining below average until 8th April, with milder and showery weather forecast after that.