Ireland's Dairy & Beef Nutrition Bulletin

Expert animal feed advice and updates from Specialist Nutrition to maximise performance on Irish farms

Specialist Nutrition
Moist Feed & Forage Specialists

Issue 07 | July 2025

Abundant Silage and Grass Growth Drive Summer Gains

Ireland's grassland sector is experiencing a notable upswing this July, positioning dairy and beef operations favourably heading into late summer.

Irish farms have experienced excellent grass growth so far this year, meaning that there's plenty of fodder available, creating a strong opportunity to build silage reserves.

Many farmers are making the decision to mow and bale heavier paddocks in an effort to preserve grass quality.

With grass growth currently outpacing demand, it may also be an opportunity to skip a nitrogen round — especially on swards rich in clover. This conserves inputs while still supporting robust DM yields of about 1,400–1,500 kg/ha.

Fields with a strong presence of clover — particularly those with over 40% coverage — can typically maintain growth without additional nitrogen for this rotation. In contrast, conventional grass-only paddocks may benefit from a reduced nitrogen application, helping to support regrowth while limiting excess input.

In areas where soil fertility is known to be low, especially in terms of phosphorus and potassium, applying a balanced fertiliser such as 10-10-20 (only if you are able to do so) can support plant health and boost productivity.

By tailoring fertiliser use to specific paddock needs and current grass supply, farmers can reduce unnecessary costs while promoting long-term grassland sustainability.

With second-cut silage now well underway, July presents an ideal window for reseeding. Soil temperatures are high, moisture conditions have improved, and paddocks cleared for silage offer a clean slate for establishing productive swards.

Farmers are advised to target fields with poor yields, weed burdens, or low-quality grass species. Incorporating high-performing perennial ryegrasses and clover varieties can dramatically improve future grass output and nitrogen efficiency. Before reseeding, ensure pH is corrected and apply phosphorus and potassium as needed.

Reseeding now will ensure new swards are well established before autumn and ready for grazing or silage in spring 2026.

Specialist Nutrition can help you plan to ensure your pastures and animals perform to their full potential.

To speak with one of our nutritionists about maximising nutrition for high performance and profitability, or to request a farm visit, call us on: +353 (0)51 833071 or email specialistnutrition.ie

How to Maintain Grass Quality and Herd Performance During the Mid-Season

With up to 40% of annual milk yield produced in May, June, and July, mid-season is a critical window for dairy farms. It's a time when high grass quality, consistent intakes, and balanced nutrition work together to drive milk volume, milk solids, and herd condition.

But maintaining quality isn't always easy. Unpredictable growth rates, mixed weather conditions, and stemmy paddocks can throw grazing off course — and quickly impact production. That's why now is the time to focus on proven grazing targets, nutrient strategies, and smart feed support.

Here's how to keep mid-season performance on track.

Stick to the 1,400 Kg DM/ha Grazing Target for Best Results

Grass doesn't grow evenly across a 21-day rotation — more often than not, the final 7 days of a round can produce as much grass as the first 14. That makes it easy to lose control of covers if the rotation slows or if weather causes a delay.

The solution? Stick closely to a pre-grazing target of 1,400 Kg DM/ha (around 10 cm). This is the sweet spot for:

- **Maximising dry matter intake**
- **Supporting milk yield and solids**
- **Encouraging leafy, high-DMD regrowth for the next round**

Don't Let Dry Weather Derail Quality

Dry spells are becoming more common mid-season and, although we had significant rainfall through May and into June, there is nothing to say we might experience a dry spell at some point this summer. In these conditions, grass growth may slow, swards can stress, and milk yields may suffer dramatically.

There are a few key points to remember if we come into a dry spell.

- **As much as possible keep grazing paddocks at the right height, even during dry periods**
- **Walk the farm before and after rainfall to know which paddocks to hit first**
- **Reset the rotation as soon as growth kicks back in**

A quick return to optimal covers after rain is key to restoring consistent grass quality and cow performance.

Nutrient Resilience Matters More Than Ever

In stressful conditions, soil fertility and nutrient status can make or break recovery. Grass with good nutrient support rebounds faster and maintains quality longer.

Focus particularly on:
Potassium (K): Vital for water movement in the plant and turgor pressure, helping grass cope with dry conditions

Sulphur (S): Supports protein synthesis and boosts growth — often overlooked, especially in light or low-S soils

If growth is stalling or regrowth is patchy, check your nutrient plan. Addressing deficiencies early gives grass the resilience it needs to power through stress and deliver high-energy feed for the herd.

Avoid Surplus Growth Turning to Waste

Once rain arrives, grass growth can surge — and it's easy to fall behind. If paddocks exceed the 1,400 Kg DM/ha target, they'll start heading for seed, lowering digestibility and energy. That leads to:

- Reduced cow intake
- Lower milk yield
- Weaker fertility and condition
- Use tools like grass wedges and weekly farm walks to stay ahead. Remove surplus quickly and graze at the right stage to maintain high-quality swards.

Strategic Feeding to Protect Herd Performance

If grass quality dips, don't wait for performance to drop. Strategic feeding can help maintain milk output and cow health.

Options include:
- **Moist feeds** or high-energy co-products to boost energy intake
- **Feeding Silage** if covers are too low or dry conditions persist
- **Minerals and Rumen Buffers** to support fertility, immunity, and rumen function

Specialist Nutrition's tailored approach ensures the right support, at the right time — keeping costs under control while protecting yield.

The Bottom Line: Stay Disciplined, Stay Flexible

Mid-season is too important to let slip. While the weather and growth rates may vary, the fundamentals don't change: target the right covers, prioritise quality, and support your cows nutritionally through any challenge.

Specialist Nutrition Can Help You Stay Ahead

At Specialist Nutrition, we help farmers get more from every hectare — even when conditions are tough. From expert advice on grass performance and regrowth to tailored feed solutions and performance minerals, we support you through every rotation.
Talk to our team today for mid-season support that protects your milk performance, milk price, and long-term profitability.

Key Tips for Maintaining Performance During the Mid-Season

By July, grass covers are high, cows are still milking well, and the weather — while unpredictable — often allows for full-time grazing. But keeping herd performance consistent requires active management of grazing practices, nutrition, and cow health.

Here's how to stay on track:

Focus on Quality Over Quantity

High covers can look impressive, but they may be hiding poor digestibility. Stemmy grass reduces intake, milk solids, and fertility. Keep pre-grazing yields in check and prioritise leafy regrowth to maintain output.

Don't Let Grass Get Ahead

Once grass gets too strong, cows won't clean it out properly. This not only lowers current performance but affects the next round's quality too. Top or remove surplus paddocks early before quality slips.

Balance the Diet

Just because spring is over doesn't mean we may not have to supplement cows. High-yielding animals may still need extra sources of energy, protein, fibre, or minerals to support their level of production.

Review Body Condition

Cows should maintain condition between 2.75 and 3.00. If you see losses at this point in the season, it's a sign energy supply is falling behind demand — adjust accordingly.

MID-SEASON CHECKLIST

Area	Key Targets	What to Watch
Pre-Grazing Covers	~1,300–1,400 kg DM/ha	Avoid going over 1,600 kg — stemmy, low-DMD grass reduces intake
Post-Grazing Height	~4 cm	Residuals above 5 cm reduce regrowth and milk solids
Cow BCS	2.75–3.00	Falling condition = poor energy intake or grazing quality
Milk Solids	Steady or improving	Drops may reflect low grass energy or excess fibre/stem
Mineral Intake	Balanced and consistent	Imbalances can lead to silent heats, lameness, or low immunity
Grazing Rotation	18–21 days	Delayed rotations = lower quality and poor regrowth
Supplements	As needed	Use buffers, minerals, and moist feeds where required

Optimising Protein & Milk Solids through Grass Quality

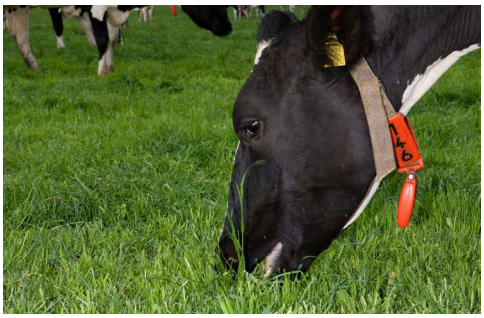
Milk protein and butterfat are key drivers of milk price — but during mid-season, even slight changes in grazing can cause drops. The focus should not only be on maintaining yield, but also on good grazing strategy to support milk solids through subtle, targeted actions.

Tailor Covers to Cow Demand

While the 1,400 kg DM/ha grazing target is well known, what matters more is the consistency of supply and quality. Keep the pre-grazing wedge level — avoid "roller coaster" paddocks with big swings in cover and quality.

Don't Chase Protein with Meal

When solids drop, the temptation is to throw in extra concentrate. Instead, look at grass quality, dry matter intake, and mineral balance. Solids are often more responsive to pasture management than diet cost.



Focus on Leaf-to-Stem Ratio

Stem rises fast in strong paddocks, especially after summer rain. Prioritise leafy, earlier-stage grass where DMD and sugars are higher. If topping is needed, do so after grazing to avoid waste and reduce energy loss.

Quick Wins to Protect Solids

- Target leafy swards with high digestibility
- Keep cows moving — avoid back grazing or overgrazing
- Adjust supplements only after reviewing sward quality
- Watch milk solids trend daily — don't wait for the co-op report

Well-managed grass delivers high solids at lower cost — but only when quality and grazing pressure stay in sync.

Getting the Best Return from Second-Cut Silage

Second-cut silage is your next big opportunity to secure quality winter feed. While the first cut may have provided the bulk, the second cut is all about achieving the quality that supports high-performing dairy and beef herds through the winter. With variable weather, rising input costs, and tighter margins, making the most of second cut has never been more important.

Here's how to plan, cut, and manage your second-cut silage to maximise both quality and return on investment.

Don't Delay Cutting – Quality Declines Fast

Once the crop reaches the right stage, cut without delay. Delaying second cut to bulk up yield often comes at the cost of digestibility, sugar levels, and feed quality. Grass matures quickly in July, and a few days' delay can significantly reduce silage DMD and energy value. Aim to cut 3–5 weeks after first cut, once regrowth hits 3,500–4,000 kg DM/ha. Grass should be green, leafy, and free of seed heads. Cutting at the right time ensures:

- **Higher digestibility and energy content**
- **Better intake potential and animal performance**
- **Less reliance on costly concentrates**

Focus on Wilting and Sugar Levels

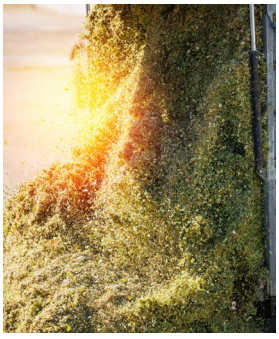
Wilting is key to preserving nutrients and improving fermentation. Aim to wilt grass to 28–32% dry matter within 24 hours of cutting. This reduces effluent loss and improves intake.
To help sugars reach the right level for effective fermentation:

- **Cut in dry conditions, ideally late morning or early afternoon**
- **Avoid mowing wet grass or during prolonged dull weather**
- **Use an additive if sugar content is low or weather is unsettled**

A rapid wilt, combined with high sugar levels, sets the stage for stable, high-quality silage.

Choose the Right Fertiliser Timing

If you're applying slurry or fertiliser after first cut, timing is everything. Second-cut grass needs around 70–80 units of nitrogen (N) and appropriate levels of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K).



Preparation Matters: Check Machinery, Swards and Weather

Before going near the mower:

- **Check mower blades are intact and replace any that have been damaged**
- **Walk fields for stones or debris that can damage machinery or contaminate silage**
- **Monitor the weather forecast — a 2–3 day settled spell is ideal to cut, wilt, and lift safely**

Also, keep an eye on grass composition. If swards are open, thin, or showing weed issues post-first-cut, this is a good time to address them before regrowth begins.

Clamp Management: Seal in Quality

What happens in the pit is just as important as what happens in the field. Good clamp management prevents waste and locks in feed value.

- **Fill and roll in layers of no more than 6 inches**
- **Use silage additive to break down fibre, releasing more sugars.**
- **Sheet the clamp tightly the same day — use a quality top sheet and side sheets to prevent oxygen ingress — wildlife access.**

Consider using SiloStop silage film to maximise spoilage prevention and feed quality.
If using bales, ensure they're wrapped tight and stored away from vermin and sharp objects.

Make Every Cut Count

The second cut is your chance to lift silage quality and reduce winter feeding costs — but it requires planning and quick action. From fertiliser timing and weather windows to clamp sealing and feed-out strategies, every decision matters.

If you want to get the best return from your second cut this year, our team at Specialist Nutrition is here to help. We offer advice on silage quality, feeding strategies, and the right moist feeds and supplements to support animal performance. Contact us today to build a second-cut plan that protects your forage and your bottom line.

Preserving Silage Quality: Getting Fermentation Right from Day One

Making great silage doesn't end with cutting — in fact, the preservation phase is where real feed value is either locked in or lost. To produce high-performance winter feed, attention to sugars, nitrates, chop length, sealing, and air exclusion is essential.

Sugar Content Drives Fermentation

Fermentation begins when grass sugars convert to acid in the pit, preserving the crop under anaerobic conditions. To achieve stable silage, a sugar level of at least 3% is needed at harvest. This can be easily checked with a refractometer in the field.

To maximise sugar levels:

- Mow in the afternoon, when sugars have peaked
- Target ryegrass swards over stemmy, leafy crops
- Aim for sunny, dry days with cool nights
- Avoid cutting overly lush or immature grass, which may have lower sugar levels
- Wilt to >28% dry matter (DM) to concentrate sugars and reduce effluent risk

Tip: Test sugars on-farm using a handheld refractometer for fast feedback.

Watch Buffering Capacity and Nitrate Levels

Grass crops differ in how they respond to fermentation. Some crops resist a pH drop — this is known as buffering capacity, and it's usually higher in high-nitrate grass or very lush material. These crops are slower to ferment and more prone to spoilage.
While high nitrates don't prevent good fermentation, they must be balanced with sugar levels. Grass with up to 800 ppm nitrate can still ensile well — if sugars are strong.

Tip: Use nitrate test strips before harvesting to check risk levels.

Chop, Fill, and Seal Without Delay

Preserving feed quality depends on fast, tight work at the clamp. Here's the gold standard:

- **Chop length:** 1.0–1.2 cm for better compaction
- **Roll continuously:** Pack in layers to exclude oxygen
- **Seal tightly:** Use two 0.125 mm polythene sheets
- **Wall protection:** Apply vertical side sheets to prevent edge spoilage
- **Inspect for 3–4 days post-filling:** Check that plastic remains tight as the pit settles
- **Prevent wildlife damage:** Use weighted nets or gravel bags to secure film

Anaerobic conditions are the key to locking in digestibility, palatability, and feed value. Any delay or missed step can lead to air pockets, spoilage, and dry matter losses.

Silage preservation starts before the first row is mowed — and finishes when the clamp is airtight and stable. Sugars, wilting, chop length, and sealing all play a part in building top-quality winter feed.

Reseed to Enhance Silage Yield and Quality

Productive silage fields rely on healthy perennial ryegrass swards. Older permanent pastures tend to respond less effectively to fertiliser for first-cut crops, resulting in delayed harvests and lower digestible dry matter (DMD). Additionally, reduced sugar content can make silage preservation more challenging.

The decision to reseed should consider potential economic returns, sward composition, and overall performance. As a general guideline, silage ground should be reseeded every 8–10 years, or every 5–6 years in systems with multiple cuts.

Many farms fall short of this recommendation, particularly when silage land is rented or located on separate blocks. Developing a comprehensive whole-farm reseeding plan that includes silage areas is essential for maintaining productivity.

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FARM SAFETY FOCUS

Staying Safe Around Machinery During Silage Season

Silage season can be high pressure — but it's also high risk. Long hours and heavy machines increase the chance of serious injury.

Key Safety Reminders:

- Never allow children or bystanders near pits, trailers, or moving tractors
- Always reverse with a guide or camera — especially around clamps
- Keep PTO shafts covered and all guards in place
- Check brakes, lights, and hydraulics before fieldwork
- Use hi-vis vests, especially during early morning or evening work
- Plan rest breaks — fatigue leads to mistakes
- Stay alert. One safe decision can prevent a lifetime injury.

Key Products for a Successful Mid-Season

Magniva Platinum Wholecrop – Advanced Silage Preservation

Magniva Platinum Wholecrop combines both homofermentative and heterofermentative bacteria to ensure rapid fermentation during ensiling and effectively prevent heating and spoilage once the clamp is opened.

Key Benefits:

- Accelerates fermentation for quicker preservation
- Enhances digestibility for better animal performance
- Offers a 15-day clamp opening window
- Increases aerobic stability to reduce spoilage risks

Specifications:

- Packaging Sizes: Treats 50 and 100 tonnes (TT)
- Best suited for dry crops
- Effective in crops with 30-45% Dry Matter

Innovative HC Technology:

Formulated with patented HC technology, Magniva Platinum delivers:

- Highly soluble inoculant for superior crop coverage
- Easy, fast mixing and refilling in the field
- Consistent, sediment-free formulation
- Precise and even application, ideal for low volume applicators

Optimise your wholecrop silage quality with the reliable efficiency of Magniva Platinum.

Silostop Silage Protection System

Advanced Films & Nets to Preserve Silage Quality and Reduce Waste

Protecting your silage from oxygen, weather, and physical damage is essential for preserving feed value and improving overall clamp performance. The Silostop Silage Protection System offers a range of innovative products designed to work together for maximum sealing power and sustainability.

Silostop Max – Premium Oxygen Barrier Film

Silostop Max is a best-in-class, 80-micron, 9-layer film that forms an effective barrier against oxygen

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Key Benefits:

- Minimises dry matter losses in the top layer
- Reduces waste on the clamp surface and shoulders
- Increases aerobic stability during feed-out
- Fully recyclable for a more sustainable operation
- Available in multiple sizes to fit any clamp or bunker

Silostop Green Open Net – Strong, Reusable Covering

Designed to protect the plastic beneath, Silostop Open Net features a 9-needle knitted weave for superior durability.

Key Benefits:

- Withstands strong winds and prevents cover lift
- Guards against bird and vermin damage
- Open weave allows air to pass through without dislodging cover
- Works seamlessly with Silostop Max and gravel bags
- Eliminates the need for tyres, reducing labour and plastic waste

Silostop Wall Film – For the Ultimate Side Seal

This lightweight, 110-micron, 7-layer wall film eliminates oxygen ingress from the sides of the pit — one of the most overlooked sources of silage loss.

Key Benefits:

- Creates an airtight barrier against oxygen from silo walls
- Enhances preservation and reduces spoilage on the edges
- Fully recyclable and available in a variety of sizes
- Performs best when used with Silostop Max and reusable top covers

Sustainable Silage Protection That Delivers

When used together, the Silostop Max, Wall Film, and Open Net system provides:

- Tighter clamps
- Reduced DM losses
- Cleaner feed-out
- Improved aerobic stability
- Significant reductions in total plastic usage

Ask us about the best combination for your clamp — and start sealing in quality while cutting waste.