

Red Meat Development Programme

G4ce News

Getting to Grips with Grazing Grass



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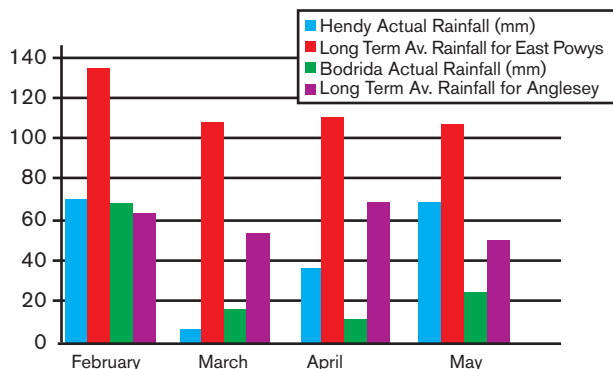
June newsletter, with an update on grass growth at the G4ce farms.

Rainfall - or lack of it - was a common topic of conversation on most farms, including the G4ce ones, this spring. Initially the dry weather made it easier to turn out livestock and carry out field work so it felt like a bonus, but it wasn't long before the dry weather began affecting grass growth.

Cumulative rainfall totals for the past seven months are less than 70% of the long term average across parts of Wales and soil moisture deficits of 40mm were recorded the end of April (Environment Agency, Wales). This will affect grass yields as the production of grass is reduced by 1 tonne DM/ha for every 50mm soil moisture deficit. This suggests yields may be reduced by as much as 0.8 tonnes DM which could be equivalent to around 2.5-4 tonnes fresh grass.

Historical records show seasonal rainfall has been highly variable in Wales however more recent records show increased winter, and reduced summer, rainfall. This recent pattern has occurred at both Bodrida and Hendy this year.

Rainfall at Hendy and Bodrida in 2011 compared to long term average rainfall for the area



Glossary:

- DM: dry matter
- MJ: mega joules
- HA: hectare
- SMD: Soil Moisture Deficit (the difference between the amount of water that is in a soil and the amount needed for crops to grow successfully).

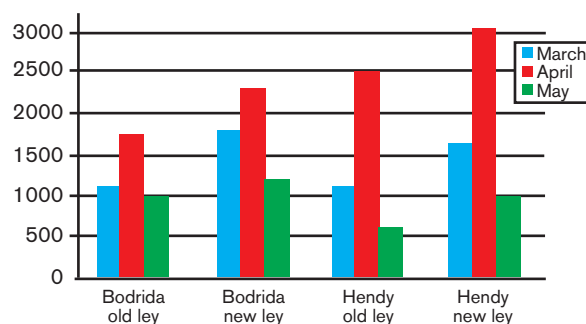
Grass Quality

The new leys at both farms continue to out-yield the old leys in May:

Bodrida	Yield kg DM/ha
Old Ley	964
New Ley	1,200
Hendy	Yield kg DM/ha
Old Ley	604
New Ley	1,022

The graph below highlights the results for the first 3 months of the project.

Grass yields (kg/DM/ha) at Hendy and Bodrida between February and May 2011



May Grazing at Hendy

At the beginning of May the grass on the grazing fields was growing well and sward height measurements showed that there was a surplus in the grazing fields. This allowed Keith to shut up an additional field with a view to either cutting it for silage or grazing it if grass sward height dropped below 4cm in the grazing rotation. As rain was forecast, it was not clear at this point which way grass growth would go; this option offered the flexibility necessary to maintain grazing quality and quantity. At the end of May this field was still shut up as very welcome rain fell on warm soils, supporting fresh growth on the grazing fields.



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development: Europe Investing in
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Your Grazing Question

How can I manage my livestock when grass is in short supply?

In dry conditions the key to managing grass supply until rain arrives to boost growth, is to maintain 3 live leaves. To do this sward height should be maintained at a minimum of:

- 4cm for sheep and 6-7cm for cattle in continuous grazing systems or
- 4cm and 7cm residual grazing height for sheep and cattle in rotational grazing systems.

If the grass height falls below these guidelines the plant will be weakened and it will take longer to start growing after rain.

Don't be tempted to graze silage aftermaths too quickly, if livestock graze of the first green shoots the sward will take longer to recover.

When sward height drops below the guideline heights, start buffer feeding or introduce supplementary feeds.

For cattle, offering straw adlib will show if supplementary feed is necessary. Where there is adequate grass, straw intake will be less than 1kg/head/day. When grass growth slows in drought conditions intakes will change rapidly over 1 or 2 days and, as a guide, once straw intake reaches 2kg/head/day supplementary feeding of higher quality feeds will be required if performance is to be maintained.

Concentrate feeding may be the most practical method of getting extra energy into cattle; with dry ground and little to no grass growth concentrates can be used successfully by applying directly on the ground. Alternatively where stocks of silage are adequate these could also be offered.

For spring calvers, consider introducing creep feeding for the suckling calves. This will reduce their grass intake, making more available for the cows. Again, offering straw adlib will provide an indicator of when supplementary feed is necessary. Once intake reaches 2-3kg/cow/day offer a supplementary feed with good protein content in order to maintain cow condition and fertility.

Ensure bulls running with the cows receive enough supplementary feed as they require almost twice as much feed as the cows.

In cases of severe grass shortage consider weaning calves as soon as they are eating 2kg/head high quality creep feed. This will allow dry cows in the correct condition to be maintained on grass at 4cm.

Offering lambs creep feed will also reduce their grass intake making more available for the ewes. Creep feeding lambs before weaning can be very cost effective, with a feed conversion rate of 5:1, compared to 8:1 after weaning.

Use a sward stick to monitor grass heights. Advice on using a sward stick can be found in 'Measuring Sward Surface Heights Grassland Development Centre Leaflet 303.01':

<http://www.grassdevcentre.co.uk/documents/303.01-MeasuringSward.pdf>

If you need to top grazing fields to maintain quality because grass has headed, cut when the livestock is grazing and they will eat the cut grass.

When the rain arrives there is likely to be a surge in grass growth so don't rush out to spread fertiliser as there should be enough nitrogen in the soil to drive grass growth.

Alternative Forage Options

Farming Connect Factsheet "Alternative Forage Options for Winter Feeding" is available from HCC if you are concerned about being short of forage. The leaflet highlights the options and costs of growing alternative forages.

New Equipment on Test



Quad Mounted Sonic Plate Meter

So far Keith Williams and Richard Rogers have been using a hand held rising plate meter and sward stick. From July Richard will begin to use a quad mounted sonic plate meter. The equipment, developed in Australia, uses ultrasound to measure sward height.

New Farmers Join the Project



Gareth Jones Andrew Owen

In June two more farmers Gareth Jones, Morfa, Aberystwyth and Andrew Owen, Middle Garth, Newtown joined the G4ce project bringing the number of farmers to four. Andrew will trial measuring grass using a piece of marked alkathene pipe, and Gareth will be using a sward stick.



Location of the G4ce Farms

For more information on this project contact Sue Buckingham, Grassland Development Centre, IBERS, Aberystwyth, 01970 823058, e-mail seb2@aber.ac.uk

The Red Meat Development Programme is delivered by Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC) on behalf of Farming Connect. For further information, ring 01970 625050 or visit www.hccmpw.org.uk