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Thinking of Joining the FVSW Dairy Grazing Group?

About the Group

The FVSW Dairy Gazing Group meets on-farm once a month from March to November with each member taking a turn to host. At each meeting we discuss relevant issues around grazing and have a farm walk led by the hosting farmer. It is informal with a lot of chat about successes and failures and a good mix of new entrants and “old-hands”. Above all, the group is welcoming and supportive, especially of those who are starting out on improving grazing management. The group contains members with a range of calving patterns and milk yields and all who aim to improve grazing management are welcome.

Group members all measure grass covers with a plate meter (see over) and operate rotation grazing systems with grass measurements figures entered onto a programme called Agrinet. The group is run by one of our vets, David Taylor, and he would be more than keen to chat with any client or non-client that is interested in knowing more. The aim of the group is simple, to maximise milk from grass in a drive to reduce costs whilst maintaining herd production and health.

You Can't Control your milk price but you can control your costs

The table to the right shows UK dairy costings for 2005 to 2025. Over that time, yields have risen by about 1,000 litres per cow but yields-from-forage have dropped by over 400l per cow as has litres per cow from grazed grass.

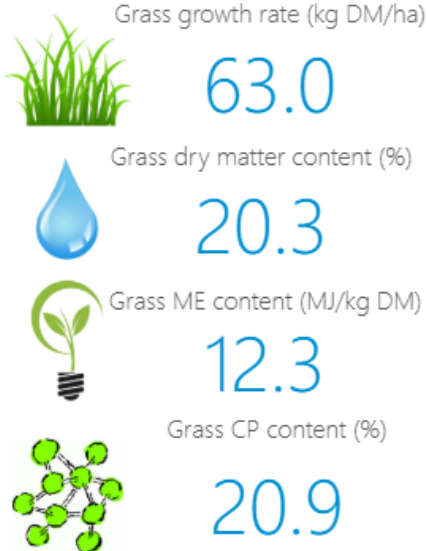
Despite the average milk price rising from 18.35ppl to 42.44ppl, the milk price to feed price ratio was the same in 2005 and 2025.

The cost to produce one litre of milk from grazed grass is around 4p, from silage around 7p and from concentrate around 12p. To put it another way, grass costs about £100 per tonne dry matter, silage around £160/t DM and concentrate around £330/t (concentrates are still about 11% water).

Grazed grass can be utilised to significantly reduce feed costs but it needs to be measured and managed to maintain quality through out the season.

ANNUAL ROLLING RESULTS					
Holstein/Friesian, Conventional Herds	Year Ending Mar 2005	Year Ending Mar 2015	Year Ending Mar 2025	Difference 10 years ago	% Change
Cows in herd	134	192	226	34	17.7%
Stocking rate (cows/ha)	2.17	2.27	2.39	0.12	5.3%
MILK PRODUCTION					
Milk yield (litres/cow)	7,440	8,052	8,421	369	4.6%
Yield from all forage (litres/cow)	2,874	2,172	2,450	278	12.8%
Yield from grazed forage (litres/cow)	1,266	939	857	-82	-8.7%
Total yield from forage (%)	39%	27%	29%	2%	7.8%
Butterfat (%)	4.03	4.00	4.35	0.35	8.7%
Protein (%)	3.26	3.29	3.38	0.09	2.7%
Bactoscan ('000)	30	26	26	0	0.0%
Cell count ('000)	184	167	153	-14	-8.4%
Milk price (pence/litre)	18.35	29.97	42.44	12.47	41.6%
Total milk value (£/cow)	1,365	2,413	3,574	1,161	48.1%
Milk price : feed price ratio	1.37	1.30	1.37	0.07	5.4%
FEED					
Concentrate use (kg/cow)	2,063	2,554	2,884	330	12.9%
Concentrate use (kg/litre)	0.28	0.32	0.34	0.02	6.3%
Concentrate price (£/tonne)	134	230	309	79	34.3%
Other purchased feed cost (£/cow)	21	67	81	14	20.9%
Total purchased feed cost (£/cow)	297	654	972	318	48.6%
Total purchased feed cost (p/litre)	3.99	8.12	11.54	3.42	42.1%
All P. Feed @ 86% DM equiv. (kg/cow)	2,257	2,841	3,115	274	9.6%
MARGIN OVER PURCHASED FEED (MOPF)					
MOPF (£/cow)	1,068	1,759	2,602	843	47.9%
MOPF (pence/litre)	14.35	21.85	30.90	9.05	41.4%

Grass Value for May 7th 2026



The Value of Grass

Using AHDB's Relative Feed Value Calculator which compares the value of different feeds relative to rape and barley, the nutrient density in grazed grass would still make it worth buying even if it was £214/tonne on a dry matter basis but if were a concentrate feed (88% dry matter) you should be prepared to buy it at £243/tonne fresh weight.

Why do we often not see this value? April and May grass is lush, green and high in nutrients but under set-stocked conditions, grass loses its quality through the grazing season. Buffer feeding can support production at grass but without knowing what grass cows are eating it can result in poor grass utilisation which, in turn, increases the need to buffer feed. There is a way to keep out of this negative cycle.

The Benefits of Rotational/Paddock Grazing

The table below shows typical grass yield (how much is grown) and utilisation (how much is actually eaten) for different types of grazing systems. Correctly set up "paddock" grazing, where cows are given a new area to graze after each milking can increase the amount of grass actually eaten by up to 92%. Under some systems of set-stocking, 50% of the grass grown gets trampled or rejected which can lead to considerable dips in quality and further refusals.

Strategy	Annual yield (t DM/ha)	Utilisation (%)	Useable yield (t DM/ha)	Percentage increase (%)
Set stocking	6.0	50	4.3	
Continuous (variable)	8.5	60	5.1	20
Rotational	10.2	65	6.6	56
Paddock	10.2	80	8.2	92

Plate Meters and Agrinet

That which isn't measured isn't managed. We aim to graze grass around 12 to 15cm high and leave around 4cms of grass in the paddock. The plate meter allows us to convert those heights in to "covers" per hectare on a "grass dry-matter" basis. The actual figures are "in" at 2,800 and "out" at 1500. This helps ensure rapid re-growth of high quality, palatable grass.

When each field is measured, the results are entered into "Agrinet", a grass management programme that allows graziers to keep on top of the amount of grass on the grazing platform and when to graze, to maximise cow intakes and grass quality. It may seem daunting having to put up fences and calculate how much area to give to the cows for each paddock but the Agrinet programme—and the back up of David and the group members—makes this a more simple operation than it can seem at the outset.



Please feel free to contact David on 07815296212 to discuss joining the group or grazing in general.