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Reviewing the cropping plan and getting animals out to grass are advice priorities to help ease stress on-farm in the coming days

An online meeting of the National Fodder and Food Security Committee (NFFSC) took place on Friday 29th March, at the request of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue TD. The meeting was called to assess the extent to which the ongoing and prolonged wet weather conditions are impacting on farms.

The overarching and common theme from contributors was around the pressure and stress being felt at farm level on foot of the persistent wet weather and difficult soil conditions. Concerns included: the lack of opportunity for tillage work in fields; fodder stocks; slurry storage capacity; and cash flow issues. Mike Magan, chair of the NFFSC, highlighted the critical importance of farmers and industry working together and supporting each other in the coming weeks.

The committee also heard about impacts and mounting pressure around workload on contractors as work builds up on farms, and the risk of logistics and haulage challenges that could impact on fertiliser and feed movements in the weeks ahead resulting in delivery delays. Additional stressors on farmers around cash flow and farm inspections were also raised by farm organisations as an additional burden on farmers. The importance of engaging early with banks around working capital requirements was highlighted.

The committee highlighted the need for ongoing advice and planning around weather related impacts on farm on both a short-term and long-term basis.

On tillage farms, an update from Teagasc highlighted that there are almost no spring crops sown as yet due to the lack of any real window of opportunity for field cultivation work. This is adding to the pressure where many autumn sown crops have struggled with weather since sowing. Teagasc highlighted the risks associated with later sown crops, particularly noting the risk of late sown crops pushing out harvest dates into September. Keeping options open to planting a range of crops remains important based on potential seed supply and also remains preferable for spreading workload and for crop rotation benefits.

Key advice to tillage farmers in the days ahead are to:

- Review cropping plan based on ongoing assessment of likely cultivation opportunities and considering subsequent workload and harvest impact
- Consider crop margin and explore other cropping options, including contracted forage crops where possible
- Secure a source of seed and fertiliser based on planned crops if not already in place

Teagasc also provided an update on grass growth data from PastureBase Ireland as well as a situation assessment based on farmer and advisor feedback from across drystock and dairy farms. The overarching consensus was that supplies of fodder are in place either on-farm, or available to purchase. Grazing progress is well behind normal on most farms, resulting in higher than normal grass covers in fields. The focus is to get grazed grass into the diet of animals when conditions allow, prioritising access to grass for longest calved cows who are nearing peak milk production.

Advice for the immediate days ahead on grassland farms is to:

- Assess opportunities to get animals out to grass. Take any opportunities available using on-off grazing, or restricted turn-out of particular groups of animals
- Assess and secure any additional fodder, feed and fertiliser required and take action early to secure supply in good time
- Look at practical steps to ease stress and reduce workload on farm

Teagasc also highlighted the upcoming Spring Grass Events taking place around the country in April as an opportunity to get advice and support in decision making in the days and weeks ahead.

In concluding the meeting, Mike Magan highlighted the importance of focusing on the immediate issues and the need to take pressure off farmers and for everybody to be watching out for and supporting each other. Future medium and longer term considerations will need to be further considered in the coming weeks, including fodder and straw provision for the winter ahead.

Ends.

Note to Editors:

Presentations made to the NFFSC committee meeting are available on the Teagasc website at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/national-fodder-and-food-security-committee/>

Details, including dates and locations of upcoming Teagasc events, including the Spring Grass and Clover Walks are available at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/>