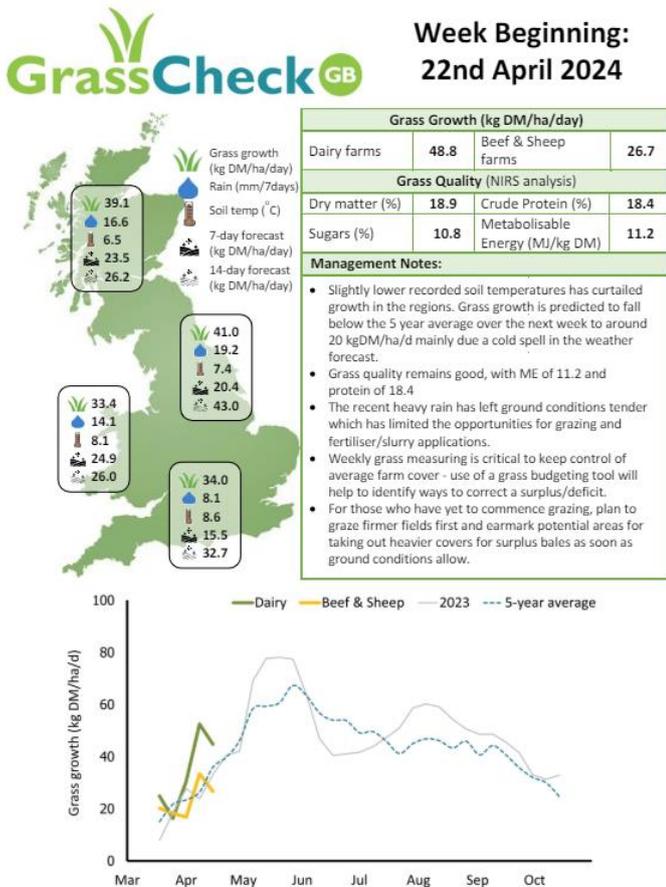


# Grass Check GB

We understand that turn-out will be on most farmers' minds and whilst there still remains a degree of uncertainty how productive this year's grass growth will be, we can use Grass Check GB to inform grazing decisions.

Grass Check is a free online reporting tool that reports grass growth changes throughout the UK and generates a weekly report, an example of which is below:



generated also indicate the energy and protein content that grass is likely to provide, based on averages of samples collected around the UK. This allows real-time information of whether buffer feeding is required and if so, approximate quantities required.

Additional to these reports the website also contains webinars and articles on topics such as forage quality, winter grazing, rotational grazing and dealing with droughts. These materials are made from data on a variety of working farms, so it allows you to benchmark yourself and get new ideas from other livestock producers, all from the comfort of your home!

When periods of fast grass growth are occurring it also helps us establish the risk of hypomagnesaemia (stagers). This is likely to become an issue in the near future due to the delayed lush spring grass that has started appearing.

We also understand that the climate has made it challenging, if not impossible to adequately prepare grazing fields with fertilizer or slurry, before turn-out. This year, more than ever, it may be necessary to assess the mineral and vitamin content of pasture. This can be achieved through a few methods;

- Soil samples; easy to obtain, the pH gives an indication
- Forage samples: easy to obtain a sample, a direct indicator of the minerals and vitamins animals are receiving and accounts for blocking agents such as Molybdenum
- Blood sampling grazing stock; directly informs us of what nutrients animals are receiving, accounting for all sources (licks, water and feed)

This is an invaluable tool for planning the grazing season and allows comparisons between this year's pasture growth and the previous year. The reports

The effects of mineral deficiencies may not become evident during grazing as the body can have stores of certain minerals which become depleted over time. To



cover the topic fully is beyond the scope of this article but please feel free to contact the surgery for further information on assessing mineral/vitamin status on your farm.

## Grass Staggers

Hypomagnesaemia (or grass staggers) has an average annual incidence of less than 1% with most cases occurring in recently-calved beef cows, although the disease is known in dairy cows. Acute hypomagnesaemia is one of few real veterinary emergencies.

Magnesium concentration within the body is dependent on absorption from the rumen, and excretion by the kidneys. Dietary magnesium is affected by magnesium levels in soil and grass, which vary considerably. Lush pastures are low in fibre, increasing the rate of passage of food through the rumen, reducing time for absorption.

Hypomagnesaemia typically presents as sudden death, with disturbed soil around the feet indicating seizure activity. In acute disease the cows are excitable, with muscle twitching and staggering. Those affected separate from the group, appear startled, grinding teeth frequently, rapidly progressing to seizure activity. Death is common.

Subclinical disease is often missed, but an annual rate of 3-4% in lactating dairy cows is suggested. Cows with subclinical hypomagnesaemia in the dry period are predisposed to hypocalcaemia (or milk fever).

Hypomagnesaemia is diagnosed through blood sampling and clinical signs.

Treatment is through administration of 400ml 40% calcium plus 50ml 25% magnesium by slow IV injection, followed by the remainder of the magnesium bottle subcutaneously. The cow should then be raised into sternal recumbency and left quietly. The remainder of the cows are likely to have subclinical hypomagnesaemia and are at risk from acute grass staggers. Blood sampling of a group of at least five cows could be performed to check herd status.

Hypomagnesaemia can be prevented through dietary management. The total diet should contain 2.5g/kg DM of Mg with the best method being using 60g MgO (calcined magnesite) per cow per day in high-magnesium cobs.

**FCN** | THE FARMING  
COMMUNITY  
NETWORK

The Farming Community Network (FCN) is an organisation which aims to help members of the farming community manage through difficult times. They are a team of 400 volunteers who provide vital support to those struggling with a range of issues such as animal disease, financial concerns, and mental health. If you are experiencing any problems no matter how small, or you are worried about the welfare of those close to you do not hesitate to get in touch.

National helpline: 03000 111 999

e-Helpline: [help@fcn.org.uk](mailto:help@fcn.org.uk)



**We're delighted to be attending the County Show again this year!  
Please come and visit us on Stand A7**

