



The cows coming in for milking on the Hannon farm and, inset, one of the milking staff at work

## FARMER PROFILE

David and Catherine Hannon, Drumree, Co Meath

David and Catherine Hannon from Drumree, Co Meath hosted one of the Smarter Milking Events in 2018. They milk 300 cows through a 25-unit herringbone parlour. The objective for the Hannon's is to produce top-quality milk as efficiently as possible in an environment that is stress-free for both milkers and cows. In recent years, David has made a number of improvements in the milking process.

"I place a big emphasis on the movement of cows from the paddocks to the milking parlour and we've undertaken a number of improvements over the last few years to the cow roadway," says David. "We've rerouted the roadway to eliminate two right-hand bends, cut overgrown hedges, increased the width and resurfaced areas of the road way. This has greatly reduced the time it takes to move the cows from the paddocks to the yard for milking."

David has also incorporated some concrete roadway nearest the collecting yard as this part of the roadway is used every day. "This is cleaned



The collecting yard and backing gate.

regularly with a mechanical brush," he adds.

The collecting yard at the Hannon's farm is capable of holding all the cows. David also has a backing gate to help with cow flow into the parlour with a facility attached to clean the yard. David points out that the backing gate is used to decrease the size of the yard and not used to force the cows into the parlour.

There is also a siren attached to the gate as it moves so the cows associate the sound of the siren with gate movement. It is also fitted with an auto stop device to allow the gate to move a set distance each time it is turned on. This is to ensure the gate doesn't run continuously and injure cows.

Best practice is adopted in terms of

the milking routine on the farm. All milkers wear a clean milking apron and nitrile disposable gloves. The milking starts as soon as the cows enter the collecting yard and clusters are attached to clean dry teats starting at the front of the parlour.

"I encourage staff to practice changing hands to hold the cluster while milking to reduce repetitive strain injury," adds David.

Cows' teats are sprayed in batches as the milker moves down the parlour. This enables the row exit gate to be opened while removing clusters and teat spraying the last couple of cows in the row.

A fully automatic drafting unit is located where cows leave the parlour after milking.

Written standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been used on the farm for over 15 years now. David has a number of full-time and part-time staff that milk for him and SOPs are essential for the milking process to be carried out safely and efficiently while producing top-quality milk.

They provide direction and improve communication for his staff. As David says: "Always assume that you won't be around tomorrow." Could the milking take place without you?

# Smarter Milking

Milking is the most important job on a dairy farm, taking up to one-third of the total labour input

**Padraig O'Connor,** Teagasc Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Programme.



- 1) Getting cows in and out (cow flow)
- 2) Milking technique (doing it right)
- 3) Producing high quality milk
- 4) Saving energy and money
- 5) Reducing time spent on milking

With herd size increasing and ever-larger milking units, the demands on the milker are growing. Working smarter can help. Teagasc, in association with the Farm Relief Service (FRS), Animal Health Ireland and the dairy co-ops, is running a series of Smarter Milking events across the country during July. These events will outline how dairy farmers and their staff can implement techniques to enable a more efficient and safer milking process which delivers high-quality milk and greater profit. Farmers will be able to discuss the milking system with the host farmers.

These events will focus on five aspects of the milking process:

**Stand 1** Jim Dockery from Farm Relief Services (FRS) will focus on getting the cows from the paddock or shed into the collecting yard through the milking parlour and back to paddock or shed again. He will look at areas such as cow road infrastructure and preventing bottlenecks. Jim will also focus on the collecting yard, backing gate and drafting cows after milking.

**Stand 2** will be covered by me (Padraig O'Connor, Teagasc). I will focus on what happens in the milking parlour, including preparing the parlour, the milker and cows for milking. I will also address cluster attachment and removal and techniques to avoid repetitive strain injury. Efficient

milking and correct application of teat spray will also be covered.

**Stand 3** is about producing high-quality milk and this will be covered by co-op personnel. The focus will be on reducing trichloromethane (TCM) and chlorine residues in milk. Washing and cleaning the milking equipment, ie the milking machine and bulk tank, will be covered.

The volume of rinse water used per unit as well as the cleaning products used are key elements in ensuring dairy farmers reach the required standards in terms of reducing the risk of these residues in milk. The quality of milk produced on farm has a big impact on its processability. The higher the milk quality, the more marketable Irish dairy products will be.

**Stand 4** will cover saving energy and money and this will be led by John Upton from Teagasc. John will discuss energy efficiency on dairy farms, with an emphasis on electricity usage, night v day rates while explaining how to benchmark your energy costs against other farms. Milk cooling is the largest energy consumer on dairy farms and pre-cooling and refrigeration will be discussed. Water heating and the use of variable speed drive (VPD) vacuum pumps are other areas where dairy farmers can make

savings on energy consumption. The benefits of reducing electricity consumption for the farmer include lower production costs and also a reduction in carbon footprint.

**Stand 5** is saving time around milking and the content of this stand will be covered by the local Teagasc dairy adviser. This includes the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs), for example preparing for milking, milking routine and washing up after milking.

A SOP is a document consisting of step-by-step instructions on how to complete a particular job or procedure on the dairy farm.

A well-written SOP will provide direction, improve communication and reduce training time. With herd size increasing on many farms and the use of hired help more commonplace, the use of SOPs will help streamline the operation.

Labelling of milking components and having a set place for items used at milking will also allow for a more efficient milking to take place. Having a well-organised milking parlour and dairy will allow the task of milking cows much easier to complete.

A number of Smart Milking events will take place in July. Check the Teagasc website for details.



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