

Grazing targets for July

Regardless of soil type and level of rainfall, the key objective over the coming weeks will be to maintain an adequate supply of high quality grass. Where grass growth is adequate (about 65kg DM/ha/day – view www.pbi.ie or the Grass10 newsletter for growth rates) a 20-day rotation and grazing 1,400kg DM/ha will be the target. It will also keep the sward at the right stage of growth. The grass plant is right for grazing when it is at the 2-3 leaf stage. Grass stem and dead material are lower in feed quality, difficult to graze, reduce cow intake and grow less grass. The south has been well behind in rainfall so far, and this is leading to lower growth rates in many areas. Where growth has slowed down, the rotation must be maintained at 20 days, i.e., graze five acres/day (2ha) where 100 acres (40ha) are available. It is important that the rotation does not speed up; the feed gap should be filled with high quality silage and meal until growth improves to meet demand. The farm cover should not drop below 500kg DM/ha.

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Breeding better beef from the dairy herd

With most dairy herds finished breeding dairy replacements at this stage, farmers are typically breeding the remaining cows to beef AI or beef stock bulls. As the breeding season enters its final few weeks, gestation length and ease of calving become increasingly important. Sires with a negative gestation length will calve more quickly and are recommended for use towards the end of the breeding season.

Data from the Angus cross Friesian cattle finished at Teagasc Grange since 2019 was analysed to determine the impact of the dairy cow beef sub index and the predicted transmitting ability (PTA) for carcass weight of the Angus sires on steer carcass weight. The results show that the lower the dairy cow beef sub index or the lower the PTA for carcass weight in a beef AI sire, the lighter the carcass weight of the progeny tends to be. Cows with a low dairy cow beef sub index tend to be

smaller, lighter and have a greater maintenance sub index than cows with a higher dairy cow beef sub index. The progeny of Holstein Friesian dairy cows (beef sub index €10) and Angus sires with a carcass weight of +10kg yielded carcasses of

300kg at 23 months of age. Therefore, for the remaining weeks of breeding, use high Dairy Beef Index (DBI) bulls that have a good balance of carcass and calving traits. This will improve the quality of later-born calves next year.



FIGURE 1: Teat wedging.

Change your liners often

The milk liner is the only part of the milking machine that comes into direct contact with the cow, so their condition is critical for mastitis control and efficient milking. Over time, worn liners reduce milking performance, decrease the speed and completeness of milking, and increase teat end damage and the spread of mastitis bacteria. Liners lose their elasticity and become collapsed as rubber deteriorates naturally over time, which gets worse with exposure to the cleaning products used for machine disinfection, in particular chlorine. When liners become worn, they take longer to open but will close early due to their tendency to collapse under vacuum. The interior of the liner can also become rough, causing small tears in the skin of the teat and this roughness makes cleaning and disinfection difficult, allowing bacteria to build up. These increase the potential of mastitis and cross-



FIGURE 2: Ringing at base of teat.

contamination between cows. The industry recommendation is to change liners after 2,000 milkings or every six months, whichever comes first. It is important to check the inside of the liners regularly to see if they are soft and smooth or rough and cracked.

The choice of liner is very important in reducing teat damage and any increase in mastitis incidence. A well-aligned good quality liner should fit the teat cup shell, as it must collapse fully around the base of the teat. If not, blood will not be able to circulate leading to teat end swelling (oedema) and damage resulting in 'wedging' at the top of the teat (**Figure 1**) or abnormal amounts of 'ringing' at the base of the teat (**Figure 2**).

The liner also needs to have a soft flexible mouthpiece that forms an airtight seal with the base of the teat adjacent to the udder. This minimises liner slip and cluster fall off. Poor

contact can take place in cows with small, very large or splayed teats, or in heifers with turgid teats due to excessive udder swelling. Herds that have increased in size, with parlour size staying the same, sometimes forget that each cluster is milking more cows now than it might have a few years ago, meaning that liners may need to be changed every three or four months. To work out exactly the number of days between liner changes, simply complete the following calculation:

$$\frac{2,000 \times \text{number of milking units}}{\text{Herd size} \times \text{milkingings per day}}$$

Flexible hours of work

Workload and finding people to work on dairy farms are currently challenges for many farmers. Farmers are wondering what can be done to reduce these challenges. To answer this question we need to know what employees actually want from employment and then determine if dairy farms can meet these needs. The list below summarises research findings and highlights the main criteria that employees look for from employers:

1. Flexible work hours.
2. Enjoyable environment/good facilities.
3. Higher than average pay.
4. Varied work.
5. Training and development opportunities.
6. Feedback and appreciation.
7. Career development and mentoring.

It is interesting that flexibility and good working conditions top the list. Can dairy farms provide

For example, if you are milking 100 cows in an eight-unit milking parlour twice a day, liners should be changed every 80 days. If milking 200 cows, the number of days between liner changes is 40.

For more information, refer to CellCheck Farm guidelines on the Animal Health Ireland (AHI) website at the following links:
Guideline 6 – <https://bit.ly/3O9A8hX>
Guideline 9 – <https://bit.ly/3bcRzQe>
Please see our short online video When Should I Change My Liners at:
<https://bit.ly/3xlcjHh>

flexible working hours? Yes, this is already happening. A dairy farm business is open from 6.00am-7.00am in the morning to 5.00pm-8.00pm in the evening for most farms. Most are open for work for 10-14 hours each day, which means dairy farmers can offer flexible hours. Tradition and mindset have been identified as barriers to change around hours of work. Hours of work and flexibility can be a deal breaker for many employees; therefore, this area must be discussed in detail as to how work can fit around an employee's requirements. In terms of an enjoyable environment and good facilities, structure and communication play a big part in delivering these. It is not a given that working outside will deliver a good environment. Time, effort and capital expenditure needs to be spent making the farm an easier and nicer place to work in. Examples include having the farmyard clean and tidy, good cow flow around the yard, equipment in working order and a plan as to what work needs to be done for the week ahead.

Use protected urea, it's cheaper than CAN



Time to Lime



Don't forget Sulphur - little and often



Reduce nitrogen on grass clover swards



Have you booked a milk recording ?



Consider weighing calves & yearlings to monitor performance since turnout



HEALTH & SAFETY

The most dangerous month



July is the month with highest levels of farm workplace deaths based on past records. Let us change this trend in 2022. Children on the farm, long working hours and managing tractors and machinery are particular safety concerns during July. It is important to be vigilant and carry out tasks with safety in mind.

Farm Safety Week starts on Monday July 18 when the official launch occurs. Daily themes are as

follows: Tuesday 19 - Childhood Safety; Wednesday 20 - Farm Safety Champions and Farm Accident Survivors; Thursday 21 - Respiratory Health; Friday 22 - Mental Health Awareness. The week is a combined UK and Ireland event. In Ireland, the week will be co-ordinated by the IFA Farm Families and Social Affairs Committee. Follow Farm Safety Week messages in the media. The hashtag is #FarmSafetyWeek.