

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday October 11th 2019

PREPARING YOUR DAIRY HERD FOR THE DRY COW PERIOD

Some of the key considerations to take into account when preparing your herd for the dry cow period are amongst others; somatic cell count, dry off & calving dates, lactation number, body condition score and silage quality.

Somatic Cell Count

High cell count cows should be considered for early dry off in order to give them a chance to cure, but also to reduce the impact on the bulk tank SCC. Cows with a high cell count throughout the year will need to be monitored closely. A long dry period (12 weeks) may help cure infection, or alternatively they may be contenders for culling.

Now is a good time to do a Culture & Sensitivity milk test, selecting a first lactation, second lactation, third lactation, fourth lactation and an older cow sample, as well as a pooled bulk tank sample. This will help identify the causative bacteria and the resistance or sensitivity to certain antibiotics – helping you to make the correct treatment decisions at dry off.

Milk recording not only helps identify high cell count cows, it helps maximise the amount and value of milk sold as well as helping in making breeding & culling decisions. The last milk recording of the lactation should take place within 30 days of drying off. Only 33% of Irish herds are milk recording, but this will need to change given that a ban on blanket dry cow therapy will come into effect in January 2022. After this date, farmers will need to provide evidence that antibiotics are required. This is necessary due to the over dependence on antibiotics in agriculture leading to anti-microbial resistance. Selective Dry Cow therapy needs to be considered as a way of reducing dependency on antibiotics.

Dry off & Calving Dates

The dry off date for your herd will vary depending on the condition score of the cow, her expected calving date and therefore the length of her required dry period. A dry period is recommended to allow the cow to replenish her body reserves for the next lactation, regenerate mammary tissue and to optimise the benefits of hormonal changes which occur around the time of calving. 8 weeks is the recommended dry period, but this needs to be increased to 12 weeks for cows in poor body condition and first lactation heifers. An early February calver in need of improving body condition should be dried off in early November.

Lactation number

As previously outlined, first lactation heifers need an additional dry period (up to 12 weeks) to build up body reserves in preparation for calving and the subsequent lactation. However, for cows that are in good condition, or indeed too good condition an 8 week dry period should be more than sufficient. Cows that are too fat at calving are at increased risk of metabolic diseases such as milk fever and ketosis in early lactation.

Condition Score & Silage Quality

Every condition score below target at calving results in the cow milking 450 litres less during the next lactation and reduced fertility. Optimal Body Condition Score for Spring Calving cows at calving is 3-3.25. Cows that need to put on 0.5 BCS will do so over an 8-10 week dry period on 68% DMD silage + 1-2 kg concentrate feeds. If silage quality is poor (60-65% DMD), the dry period should be extended and/or supplementation rates increased. To gain 1.0 unit of BCS, cows will require 12-14 weeks dry on 68% DMD silage + 2-3 kg concentrate feed.

Management Summary

As the saying goes 'you cannot manage what you do not measure' and therefore it is recommended that in the coming month all dairy farms should

- a) Culture & Sensitivity test milk samples
- b) Arrange milk recording to take place within 30 days of dry off
- c) Body condition Score cows,

d) Get silage tested. Silage can be tested 6 weeks after ensiling.

Upcoming Events

1. Teagasc, in conjunction with IFAC, will host a Succession & Partnership Event on the farm of Tom and Tommy Murphy Ballycahane Portlaw Co. Waterford on Thursday the 17th October at 11am. There is a very interesting story to be heard on this farm in relation to putting a succession plan in place, what was required to set up the partnership and the advantages it brings to the farm business and the people involved. All are welcome.
2. Join Teagasc for the Green Acres Calf to Beef Farm Walk on the farm of Thomas & Peter O'Hanrahan, Kiljames, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny on Thursday the 10th of October at 2.30pm. This programme is demonstrating dairy calf to beef systems on a whole farm basis. The primary aim of the project is to demonstrate achieving a high level of technical efficiency in these systems and its impact on profitability.

