

Shinagh Dairy Farm Review of 2019

2019 was a good year for the farm. Grass production was back to normal after the drought of 2018 which reduced grass growth by 4 tonnes per hectare and required buying in extra feed to fill that deficit. Our objective is to grow a lot of grass, and graze it when it is at the best quality. We are continually applying lime to ensure we are giving the ground no excuse not to grow plenty grass. We know that if the land is not at the optimum Ph we won't get the best use out of the expensive and limited amount of P we are allowed use under the Nitrates Directive. The farm is in derogation and produced 243kg of organic nitrogen per hectare in 2019. We have reduced our stocking rate from previous years to ensure we don't need to export slurry.

226 cows were milked and they supplied 416kg of milk solids per cow to the Co-op. More importantly they supplied 1272 kg of milk solids per hectare. This required €178 of bought in feed per cow, €140 in the form of dairy ration, and €38 of bought silage (bought growing and ensiled in Shinagh). The herd were fed on average 500kg of dairy ration for the year. Milk composition and price were good in 2019 at 4.65% Fat and 3.85% protein, 145,000 SCC which delivered a nett milk price of 40.31 cents per litre.

The driver of this was the grass grown of 14.80 tonnes of drymatter per hectare. We measure grass covers weekly and use Pasturebase to help make decisions on grazing management. In spring we operate to a spring rotation plan which means we graze approximately 1% of the farm per day in February and 2% of the farm per day in March, that leaves us with just enough first grazing paddocks in April to get us to the second rotation. Our magic day is usually around the 12th of April.

Calving started on the 2nd of Feb (the planned start date was the 9th) and 93% of the herd calved in the next 6 weeks. Therefore there is a big demand for grass in spring. To achieve this we closed at a farm cover of 730 on the 12th of November. Cows go to grass soon after calving (as soon as their milk can go in the tank) and graze both day and night (weather permitting). Up to 5kg of ration per day will be fed to supplement the grass. The aim is to fully feed the milking cows with grass and meal, without any silage. Silage has to be fed if the cows don't get to grass and if we are going through grass faster than our spring rotation plan.

We contract reared all calves from 14 days other than our own dairy replacement heifers in 2019. 60 of these were reared to weaning on the farm and then continued onto our contract rearer for breeding this year. The remaining calves were contract reared to 6 weeks. The surplus dairy heifers were sold at a profit, however 105 beef calves were sold at 6 weeks at a loss of €65 per head after paying for their milk replacer, feed and rearing costs. We sent no calf for processing in 2019 and will not do so again in 2020.

The farm had net cash of €3486 per hectare in 2019 or €1206 per cow. From this land rent, labour, bank repayments had to be paid. These costs reduced the figure to €1271 per hectare or €440 per cow. The big picture is that the farm left €100,000 cash after all payments. This does not include EU basic farm payments.