

Shinagh Dairy Farm Report 16-10-2019

Farm Update

There are 209 cows milking now.

There was an 8.23% not in calf rate (NIC) this year after 11.5 weeks total breeding season. All the not in calf cows have been sold at this stage, because they were costing more per day than we were getting from them in milk plus their value was dropping each day as more of these cows come on the market. It is the same balancing act each year. Nitrate regulations also favour selling these cows earlier as this allows us carry more cows during the peak grass and milk part of the season.

The farm grass cover is 1040kg/ha or 390kg/cow. We hit our high of 1254kg/ha on the 27th of Sept and have been eating into this high cover since. Growth rate for the last week was 40 kg/ day. The herd is stocked at 2.67 cows per hectare, with a demand of 37kg/ha, as we reduce demand by selling empty cows and feeding ration. We started our last rotation on Oct 5th and plan to graze 60% of the farm by Nov 6th, ie 2% of the farm each day, the remainder of the farm will then be grazed from then to housing full time in late November, to ensure grass in the diet as long as cows are milking. We are feeding 3kg of a 12% protein ration, as part of our plan to reduce emissions. Balancing the diet for protein is both a cost saving and environmental friendly method of reducing emissions. Ruminants do not need extra protein and if they are fed extra above their needs they increase their emissions. Therefore grazing high protein grass at the moment only needs low protein ration.

The current co-op milk details are as follows: 12.81litres/day at 5.28% fat, 4.48% protein, 4.61% lactose, 158,000 SCC and 11,000 TBC. That's 1.29 kg of milk solids per cow per day.

Our target is an 18% replacement rate, which is the optimum in terms of making genetic gain and having a mature herd. We have been running at 8% not in calf or less each year so this is allowing us to cull 10% on top of this for other reasons. The average lactation age of the herd currently is 4.2 lactations and our target is to increase this to 4.5 lactations, by having a reduced % of heifers entering the herd and retaining cows longer in the herd.

We have done a complete bio-diversity study of the farm and we are now in the process of drawing up a plan to increase and improve our bio-diversity. We were delighted that 6.9% of the farm are already habitats. As part of our plan to improve this we intend to take the fence wires out from some of the south facing ditches (a max of 2 meters from the ditch edge) to allow the natural vegetation to grow, we may plant some wild flower species in this area eventually. It will be important to ensure no fertiliser is spread in this area as this will favour normal grass rather than the other species we are trying to encourage. We know the cows will graze at least a half meter under the wire so the loss of productive area will be small.

We have passed the Bord Bia SDAS audit again recently, without any issues.

Updates are on the Shinagh website: <http://www.shinaghdairy.ie/>