

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 13th November 2020

Selective Dry Cow Therapy

From January 2022, dairy farmers will be required to move away from Blanket Dry Cow therapy, and adopt a more selective approach based on infection levels within individual cows. Reducing antibiotic usage, as well as being a potential cost saving, is aimed at slowing the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Selective dry cow therapy involves administering a dry cow tube only to cows with infection during the lactation. The remaining cows will receive an internal teat sealant only as a preventative against infection getting into the udder during the dry cow period. The process has already been adopted on many dairy farms in West Cork with great success. However, it is not without risk and therefore it is vital that the process is properly planned and administered with the help of your advisor and Vet.

Milk Recording

Before deciding to proceed with selective dry cow therapy in your herd, it is important to assess the current infection levels at herd level. Milk recording data is vital in this decision making process, and without it the risks are simply too high. In reality a minimum of 6 recordings per year are required to get solid information on TBC and SCC. It is also important to have milking recording data available which is less than 4 weeks old at time of dry off. Therefore, it may be necessary to schedule an additional milking recording shortly to ensure there is suitable information available to you to cover the spread in dry off dates in your herd.

Critical Thresholds

To be considered suitable for selective dry cow therapy, a consistent bulk tank SCC level of less than 200,000 is required, with a new infection rate of less than 10% in the previous dry period. The new/recent infection rate in the milk recording preceding dry off should be less than 5%.

It is extremely important to culture and sensitivity test a number of milk samples from your herd to find out what mastitis causing organisms are present. Take a number of samples from high cell count cows of varying age, as well as a bulk tank sample. If samples from clinical cows were taken and frozen before treatment during the year these can also be included and provide useful information about what was happening in the herd during the year. Care is needed to ensure good hygiene when taking samples to avoid contamination. As well as being useful for deciding which antibiotic to use in your herd, the sample results will also tell you if *Strep Agalactiae* is present in your herd. *Strep Agalactiae* is a highly infectious mastitis, and for this reason selective dry cow therapy is not recommended in herds where it is found.

Once it has been established that your herd is suitable for selective dry cow therapy, individual cow information must be assessed to determine which cows will only receive a teat sealer, and which cows require both antibiotic and sealer tubes. The Milk Recording SCC profile screen on ICBF is a useful way to filter individual cow information. A common recommendation for selecting cows is to have an average SCC of less than 100,000, and no individual recording greater than 200,000 in the year.

Choosing the right Cow

However, I would recommend a more cautious approach if this is your first year of selective dry cow therapy. Select cows which have an average SCC of less than 50,000 for the year, and no recording greater than 100,000 during the year. Do not select any cows for selective treatment which have had a clinical case of mastitis during the year. It is also advisable not to select cows with warts, leaky cows, or other cows which are difficult to teat seal. Only dry off an easily manageable number of cows at one time, and remember good hygiene is critical.

TASAH Dry Cow Consultations are available again this year. These are free veterinary consultations to enable farmers to engage with their vet and develop a farm specific dry cow treatment strategy. For further details on how to apply visit the Animal Health Ireland website.

It cannot be over emphasised how important milking recording is for the successful implementation of Selective Dry Cow Therapy on your farm. For herds who plan to start milk recording next year, it is advisable to do at least one recording this autumn, while all herds should ensure that their first recording next spring takes place within 60 days of the first calving. This will allow you see how successful your dry cow management is this winter.

