

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 1st October 2021

Cathal Moran is farming at Curraghlane, Skeoughvosteen on what would be considered mainly dry land and which at times can be drought prone. He took over the family farm in 1998 when the milk quota was 60,000 litres (800,000 litres at the end of the quota era in 2015 and almost 1,850,000 litres supplied in 2020). At that stage the farm also had sheep & beef enterprises with some cereals. In the intervening time Cathal has concentrated on increasing cow numbers to the stage where he is now milking 370-380 cows. Cathal was fortunate that there was plenty of land available nearby for long term leasing. As a participant in the Teagasc/Glanbia Future Farm programme Cathal is committed to the sustainable production of milk. As part of this joint programme an open day will be held on Friday 1st October at 11 am. What has enabled this expansion to take place & how is the farm operated at present? What has happened on the farm to ensure that it meets the criteria for the Future Farm programme?

- Overall farm structure – the farm rises to 580 ft over sea level in places & is facing north. Walking long distances with cows is an issue & grass growth can be affected by periods of drought in the growing season. Buffer feeding is a regular feature of the farm.
- Breeding & Calving – EBI has driven genetic progress on the farm. Overall herd EBI is €188 with a milk sub index of €41 & fertility sub index €88. The current maintenance figure for the herd is €12 giving an average mature cow weight of 580 kg. The EBI figure for the 2021 calves is €239 indicating the progress that is being made genetically. Sire selection – high EBI sires with an emphasis on % solids & fertility with a target of €120 for the fertility sub index in the herd. 86% cows calved over a six week period this year with a mean calving date of around 20th February. Cow performance – 2020 - 454 kg Milk Solids, 4.46% fat & 3.76% protein. The target is 500 kg milk solids & with herd maturity Cathal is confident that this will be achieved in the future. Genomic analysis of all animals in the herd has been carried out & this will identify the cows most suitable for breeding replacements. Results of recent scanning show a very satisfactory empty rate of 6.8% in the cows & 3.4% in the heifers.
- Milking facilities, housing & slurry storage – 30 unit parlour with cubicles (all uncovered) for 400 cows & slurry storage for over 20 weeks in lagoons & slatted tanks. The farm is in a good place to meet any increase in storage requirements in the future. No intention to cover the uncovered cubicles at present.
- Overall Stocking Rate & Grass growth & Soil Fertility – grass measured & entered on Teagasc Pasturebase system. In excess of 13 tonnes Dry Matter/ha grown on the farm. Milking Platform – 118 ha – 3.2 cows/ha on MP. Emphasis on varieties conducive to good graze out e.g. Abergain, Aberchoice. Soil fertility is good overall on the farm – 72% farm is at least index 3 for Phosphate & 59% at index 3 for Potash. As of 2021 there is a lime requirement of 135 tonnes with 90% of the farm at pH 6.2+. Considering that about 50% of the farm is leased this is a very satisfactory situation.
- Labour – one full time person employed on the farm & up to 5 people assist on a part-time basis including students. This part-time assistance amounts to 1 ½-2 labour units. Contractors are employed to spread all slurry, soiled water & chemical fertilizer. Silage cutting also done by contractor. An automatic footbath was installed in 2021. This year Cathal got someone to supervise night time calving for 2 nights/week & it is intended to operate this system every night next year. Once a day milking is practiced until a week after mean calving date (late February). Every calf receives biestings within a short time of birth. Cathal has regular buyers for the beef calves & they are collected from the farm. Good system in place for communicating with others working on the farm – whiteboards in parlour & office, paddocks numbered, what's App group.
- Replacements (100 in 2021) are reared on an automatic feeder.

- Environmental issues – investment in solar panels. Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) - 100 %. Use of Protected Urea as source of chemical nitrogen for last 4 years. Re-seeding – emphasis on inclusion of clover with the aim of building from a current low level.
- Biodiversity - On Cathal's farm 10% of the farming platform (owned land) is dedicated to biodiversity habitats and features such as hedges, watercourses and tree groves (10% is the target on this type of farm). Cathal recently planted a new native whitethorn hedgerow close to the farmyard. One of the main habitats found on Cathal's farm are hedgerows of which there are 9Km. These hedgerows are tall and contain flowering thorn trees and therefore act as networks for nature that provide nesting sites and song posts for birds, cover for small mammals and bird and space for native plants to grow which in turn provide a varied food sources for pollinators and birds, while also providing shelter to livestock. There is also 36 ha commercial forestry on the farm which plays its part in carbon sequestration.

Challenges for the future:

- The recent allocation of milk supply at peak production by Glanbia will allow Cathal to maintain current cow numbers.
- Labour – planning permission recently granted for silage pits which will hopefully be built next year. This will reduce the time spent moving baled silage. Planning permission lodged recently for an underpass – this will reduce time spent moving cows. In terms of breeding Cathal is adopting the 'why wait' (New Zealand) strategy in order to have more compact calving.
- Leasing land – just over 75% of the grassland area is leased land. A lot of work associated with this land in terms of improving infrastructure and this is coming to an end.
- Covering uncovered slurry storage tanks – current proposals are indicating that lagoon stores will have to be covered by 2027. Cathal is awaiting developments in this area.
- Stocking Rate – 2.2 LU/ha or 187 kg organic N/ha in 2020. Room to increase the stocking rate but no plans to increase cow numbers at present due to supply restrictions.
- Chemical nitrogen usage - reduce usage of chemical nitrogen by better use of slurry & soiled water. Also increase the contribution from clover by including it in all reseeds.
- Water quality – as part of the regulations associated with derogation farmers further work is required to improve water quality e.g. install ramps & ensure fences along designated watercourses are 1.5m from the bank.
- Soil fertility – target slurry at fields with at index 1 & 2 for P & K & satisfy the lime requirement on the farm.
- Selective Dry Cow treatment (SDCT) – will commence this in 2022. Only back milk recording since November 2020.