

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 3rd December 2021

Start preparing now for next Spring

As the year draws to a close and spring calving herds begin to dry off their cows it is nice to reduce the workload and try to recharge the batteries before what normally is the busiest time of the year -calving season. Spare time is usually at a premium during these busy months, so it is important to be as prepared as possible before things start to kick off. Ideally a checklist should be made of what needs to be done over the coming weeks.

The key areas to focus on over the coming six to eight weeks are to:

1. Have all the equipment required (e.g. see below)

- Soft nylon ropes
- Buckets
- Disinfectant and lubricant
- Stomach tubes (one for sick calves and one for colostrum management)
- Feeding bottle
- Iodine
- A thermometer and a warming box
- Calf jacket or infra-red lamp
- A box of arm length gloves and standard rubber gloves
- Access to warm water
- Ensure to order enough calf tags
- Electrolytes

2. Have cows in as good condition as possible calving down

- Ideally your silage should be tested for both mineral content and feeding value so as to determine the best dry cow diet for your cows.
- The majority of metabolic disorders occur during the spring period so feeding a balanced mineral with a particular focus on the Phosphorous, Magnesium and Vitamin D levels is required. Start on time, for at least six weeks before calving.
- Group cows where possible and feed according to Body Condition Score in order to have them calving at 3 – 3.5 BCS.
- Make sure cows have received all their required vaccines.

3. Have the sheds set up to make life as easy as possible:

- If there are any adjustments to be made to the sheds it is not too late to get the work done.
- Ensure calf pens are clean and disinfected.
- Calf houses need to be ventilated, draught free and have adequate space for the number for calves intended for the house (min 1.5m² per calf)
- Calves need access to clean water and feed also
- Ensure calving gate and calving jack are in good working order, so as to be able to handle animals in a safe way

4. Make sure you have enough help/labour during the peak months:

- Make sure there is enough help if needed on the farm during the busy months of the year.
- Be flexible and open minded when it comes to taking people on.

- Take them on before things get busy to teach them the different skills and to familiarise themselves with the layout of the farmyard etc.

So to conclude calving season can be a stressful time of the year, but can be made easier by being organised and setting the farm up so things can run as smoothly as possible it is important to look after yourself during these months by getting rest when you can and to eat healthy. Finally, remember to think about safety when going about your daily routine to avoid accidents especially when fatigue sets in.

