

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 13th March 2020

DAIRY NOTES

March is crunch time for calf health

Mid March to early April is the highest-risk time for calf health problems. Numbers of young calves peak, putting you and your calf-rearing facilities under pressure. Now is a good time to review management and hygiene around calf rearing on your farm:

1. make sure calves have at least 1.7m² floor area and 10m³ of air space per head (measure if you are not sure) – having correct space per calf reduces disease risk;
2. maintain clean bedding;
3. avoid adding extra calves in pens if short on space; instead provide some extra area (e.g., hutches, new shed area) or better still, get some early-born calves out to grass;
4. as calving slows down, do not mix younger and older calves in the same pen – pens must be cleaned and disinfected and allowed to dry before introducing a second crop of calves;
5. keep registrations up to date and move out calves that are to be sold as soon as possible;
6. ensure that later-born calves get enough colostrum;
7. ensure that late-calving cows are well fed and receiving enough minerals;
8. clean and disinfect dump buckets, calf-feeding bottles and other equipment, as these can tend to accumulate dirt over the busy period; and,
9. clean and disinfect calving pens.

Sick calves mean more work, more stress, poorer welfare and lower lifetime performance. A few checks in mid March can make a big difference to the health of your calves.

Early milk recording is a must!

To get the best value from milk recording, you need to milk record not more than 60 days after the first cow calves. An early milk recording will:

1. establish the effectiveness of your dry-off routine and tube used;
2. identify new infections early;
3. establish the root cause of new infections;
4. reduce the spread of infection within the herd; and,
5. identify incurable cows, i.e., cows that have not been cured over the dry period. These chronically infected animals should be culled or at minimum, offending quarters should be identified and dried off immediately to prevent spread of infection.

Contact your milk recording service provider as soon as possible to arrange your first milk recording for 2020.

BEEF NOTES

Large penalties looming on BDGP payments

We are in the sixth and final year of the first Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP 1). It is this year that your herd must meet the most difficult targets set by the scheme, those of the replacement strategy.

Penalties will be incurred if the targets are not met. The big one is the 50% requirement for four- and five-star cows/heifers on October 31, which incurs a 140% penalty. So, not only will you not receive any payment for this year, you will also be deducted a further 40% of the gross payment from another scheme.

The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) will be writing to the farms not meeting their requirements to inform them of where they stand and what the penalty for non-compliance will be. However, this information is available online on the ICBF website, which is live and will give you the most up-to-date picture.

Simply login to your ICBF account, go to Services → Beef Data and Genomics Programme → Eligibility Profiles. This screen lays out very clearly your own situation and is your starting point.

If you are meeting your requirements you can see by how much and ensure you stay that way by not selling eligible animals. If you are not meeting the targets what are your options?:

1. You could still meet the requirements in-herd by genotyping females born before June 30, 2019 and ensuring you have their genomic evaluation back by October 31. Use your BDGP Euro-Star Report and pick the cows/heifers that are four or five star but do not have a genomic evaluation. You must genotype 60% of the reference number of females anyway. You can request hair cards from the ICBF for more animals at a cost of €22 each. This service is available online under Genomic Services. To ensure you have a genomic evaluation back to be included for the October 31 deadline, samples must be in the laboratory by July 8.
2. Buy in genotyped four- or five-star cows/heifers. The mart screen will show if an animal is four or five star, but you need to ensure it also shows a genomic evaluation down on the bottom right of the screen. If not, you will have to get her genotyped and she may fall below four star on genotyping. The same applies if buying directly off farm, ensure the seller prints you her star rating, she is genotyped and born prior to June 30, 2019 before you purchase.
3. Maintain your four- or five-star stock bull, but if you replace him it must be with another four- or five-star stock bull.
4. AI is straight forward, but if you are using both AI and stock bulls, you must meet the requirements of both.

If you are unsure about any of the above please contact your local Teagasc advisor or the ICBF on 023-883 2883.

HEALTH & SAFETY FIRST

Think ahead to prevent injury and illness

Preventing injury and ill health requires thinking ahead. Farms are very dynamic workplaces in spring, with a lot of dangerous movement – tractors and machines, livestock, bales, and fertiliser. In other dangerous industries (e.g., oil and smelting) zero-injury levels are being achieved routinely. This is done using a rigorous approach to technology adoption and work practice. Checklists are used to ensure that all measures are implemented. This spring protect yourself, especially from cows around calving and knockdowns from tractors and other machines, which are the biggest killers on Irish farms