

## Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday July 5<sup>th</sup> 2019

### Milk recording reports

The uptake of milk recording by dairy farmers in Ireland is low with just 33% of herds and only 48% of cows recorded in 2017 (ICBF). This compares very poorly with other countries such as New Zealand (75% of herds) and Denmark (90%).

Milk recording reports provide valuable information following each milk recording event. Somatic cell count (SCC) management is one of the main reasons that farmers' milk record but the reports can be used to make critical breeding decisions and decisions on managing the dry cow period.

When milk recording reports are combined with ICBF Sire Advice, they can help to improve genetic gain by identifying the best cows from which to breed replacement heifers. While learning to interpret the milk recording reports correctly along with mastitis incidence recording will be critical to make good decisions at dry off. There are numerous ways to record mastitis cases including, text message to ICBF, use of farm software packages or simply a diary. Milk sampling at milk recording also allows the options to screening for Johnes and also to diagnose pregnancy.

As we move towards selective dry cow therapy strategies, milk recording reports combined with Mastitis Incidence recording will be even more critical in a non-blanket dry cow therapy environment in the future.

The first milk recording in a lactation should be carried out within 60 days of calving. This is crucial to analysis of the previous dry cow therapy performance. Where the new infection rate is greater than 10%, it is an indication that practices during the previous dry period were not satisfactory. Before selective dry cow therapy is considered, a dramatic improvement in hygiene and dry cow procedures is vital.

### Current Mastitis Issues on farm

To date, 2019 has been a very good year for milk quality in general. However, over the last number of months the following issues have been arising.

- Strep mastitis effecting best milking low cell count cows, this mastitis can give all the symptoms of e.coli, a very sick cow if missed for 12 hours. Fly control; adequate post milking teat dipping and keeping cows off cubicles post milking are a significant help.
- Liner change should be due around now; target is 2,000 milking's or 6 months whichever comes first. Do not let this pass, remember the liner is the only part of the milking machine coming in contact with the cow.
- Watch dry cows for flies, a topical pour on should be applied depending on slaughter time, this will aid significantly in fly control with the change in weather.
- Ensure your teat dip has a fly repellent in it, your provider should be able to tell you whether it is present or not.
- Continue to wear gloves during milking, and disinfect clusters after problem cows, cross transfer during the milking process is a significant cause of pro longed mastitis outbreaks.

### Pre-Mowing– Am I Wasting My Time?

The number of farmers enquiring about pre-mowing paddocks has increased in June as grass quality has deteriorated on some farms. Growth rates have been variable in the past two weeks and some farmers have had to graze stronger paddocks (>1,500 kgs DM/ha). Pre-mowing is not an excuse for bad grazing management but it can be used as a short-term alternative to topping to ensure good quality grass in the next rotation. Ideally, cows should be grazing 1,400-1,500 covers and where this is possible, there is no logic in pre-mowing. Let the cows do the work as it

means less work on you the farmer and less cost in terms of machinery running costs. Research from New Zealand shows there was no increase in animals' performance over grazing and regular pre-mowing reduced the density of the grass sward and total grass grown.

Despite this however, some farmers routinely pre-mow for one round at this time of year as they prefer it to topping after grazing. Where this is done, it is important not to cut too much grass ahead of the cows. Cut enough for the evening and morning milking and split into two allocations. Grass should be cut in the evening so that one allocation is fresh and the second is less than 12 hours on the ground. Pre-mowing does not work well in wet weather as cows will soil grass more and therefore, intakes are not as high. In dry weather the clean out will generally be good.

The recent soft rain and warm temperatures has increased grass growth on farms again. In high grass growth periods, it is critical to walk the farm at least once each week as the grass situation changes very quickly. Pre-mowing makes no sense in these circumstances and farmers would be better advised to skip strong paddocks and bale them immediately so they are not lost out of the rotation. This ensures that cows are grazing the best quality feed and these high quality bales can be used later in the autumn or as part of the winter feed requirement.

