

Teagasc Notes for the week ending Friday 16th June 2017

Dairying

Grass quality

Grass quality can be poor on many farms in June. Grass quality has a large effect on both the yield of milk solids and the protein content of milk (and therefore milk price achieved). Turning surplus grass into round bale silage is a very useful approach to keeping quality grass in front of cows. Cows need to enter fields of leafy grass (1,400kg DM/ha) all the time to maximise performance from grazed grass. Once farm cover exceeds 160-180kg DM/cow, there is surplus grass available. When grass gets too strong for grazing, many farmers prefer to top paddocks and therefore waste grass to keep grass quality right. While some topping may be necessary, making round bales is much more beneficial to the overall feed supply on the farm. It will correct the grass surplus without forcing cows to eat stemmy grass.

Save time – drop the strip wire

Using strip wires for grazing in summer is time consuming. It takes time to put wires up and take them down. You must also make a decision at each grazing to allocate the correct amount of grass. If you continually get allowances wrong, it will affect cow performance, especially heifers. Moving to paddock sizes that allow for three grazings will reduce time spent at grassland work and improve cow performance. When cows enter a three-grazing paddock, they will have two full feeds and a further feed that cleans out the paddock. The next grazing is a full feed again when cows enter a new paddock.

Small adjustments to wires/fences could facilitate three grazings per paddock on many farms. The ideal paddock size depends on herd size. Typical grass intake per day is about 17kg of grass DM, or 25kg DM for three grazings. Therefore 100 cows need 2,500kg DM in a three-grazing paddock. The ideal pre-grazing cover to graze is 1,400kg DM/ha (grass at the three leaf stage). Therefore, a paddock size of 1.8ha ($2,500 \div 1,400$) is ideal for three grazings and 14 paddocks of this size are required for a 21-day rotation.

Lime gives you free phosphorus and potassium

Dairy farmers who farm on heavy land find it very difficult to spread lime during the 'closed' period, due to the poor trafficability of the land. Therefore they can only spread lime on grass during the main grazing season. These farmers take a flexible approach and spread lime when paddocks are cleaned off. So lime is spread on paddocks that are cut out for round bale silage or pit silage. The contractors will apply lime at 1.5-2.0 tonnes/acre on such areas. This might mean a contractor spreading six tonnes on three acres. Planning and flexibility are key. Be prepared to take the opportunity offered by a cleaned off sward and good weather conditions to apply lime. Remember that applying lime to soils to raise the pH above six will increase the availability of phosphorus (P), and to a lesser extent potassium (K). Compound fertilisers are not cheap (especially P) so use lime (where required) to release P from the soil and lower your fertiliser costs.

Teat disinfection – don't cut it out

After a long, busy spring you may be tempted to skip some of the 'routine' jobs that take a bit of time. Some people also consider cutting out some of these practices in order to save money. But very often, this cost 'cutting' is not cost 'saving' in the long run. Post-milking teat disinfection is a perfect example. Good teat disinfection after milking reduces new mastitis infections by 50%. It does this by killing the bacteria that are left behind after milking, and by maintaining the teat skin in good condition. By not teat disinfecting, you will save some money in the short term on product, but very quickly it will lead to an increase in the number of new mastitis infections. Not all of these new infections will be obvious, clinical ones; many will be subclinical infections, which only present as a high somatic cell count (SCC), but still have a significant effect on the cow's production and are a continued source of infection for other cows. For good mastitis control, the goal is to cover all the skin, on all of the teats, of all of the cows, all of the time!

Remember: Use at least 15ml/cow/milking to get good coverage when spraying, or 10ml/cow/milking if using a dip cup.

Managing replacement heifer weanlings

Replacement heifer calves should be weaned when they weigh approximately 18% of their mature body weight (BW), e.g., 100kg for a Holstein Friesian (HF) heifer calf.

- If taking them off concentrate, they should be approximately 140kg (~25% mature BW for HF heifer) and then wean them gradually off meals onto an all-grass diet.
- It is a good idea to keep calves which are not thriving in a smaller group (e.g., less than 20) as there is less competition between animals in such groups and they can be preferentially fed meals and higher quality grass to improve growth rates.
- If the lighter calves catch up and grow to a similar size to those in the main grazing group (i.e., calves on target weight), they can be removed from the smaller group and returned to the main group; calves which are falling behind in this group can be moved to the smaller group.
- Pre-grazing yields should be approximately 1,100-1,300kg DM/ha.
- A good worming protocol is necessary during the first grazing season.
- Calves should be weighed regularly to ensure that they are achieving target weights.

Recommended weights for different breeds and cross breeds at weaning, six months and nine months of age.

	Holstein Friesian	British/NZ Friesian	Jersey X Holstein Fr
Weaning weight (kg)	100	95	90
Six month weight (kg)	165	160	150

Health and Safety

More children on your farm

Summertime means more children are on farms with a consequent increased injury risk. The death of a child is particularly harrowing. Preventing farm accidents involves spotting and removing hazards to children. Young children should not have unrestricted access to farmyards so provide a safe play area and accompany them when on the farm. As children grow older they should receive proper instruction and supervision on how to carry out appropriate farm tasks.