

## Managing the breeding season

Most Co. Limerick dairy farmers are 3-4 weeks into the breeding season at this stage. It's often a time in the breeding season when things change slightly so it's well worth sitting down for a half an hour and going through records to see how things are progressing. Any cow that has not been submitted for service by now should be seen by a vet to see what her problem is.

As a guide 5-6 AI straws should be used per heifer calf required next spring. Once the required amount of AI is used farmers can then switch to using beef breeds. Some farmers will have the required amount of AI used after 3 weeks, for others it will be 6 or even 8 weeks. If continuing AI, now is really the time when a vasectomised bull is of great use. Heat activity in cows begins to drop off as more and more go in calf and they can become very difficult to see bulling on their own even with heat detection aids. A vasectomised bull with a chin ball marker will work around the clock and miss no cow on heat.

To counteract the drop in heat activity a lot of farmers will introduce the stock bull at this stage. For some it will be a dairy stock bull, for others it will be a beef breed. One in three stock bulls are either sub fertile or infertile and bearing this in mind a fertility test should be done on the bull before he is left run with the cows. This doesn't guarantee the fertility of the bull throughout the season but it will give a good handle of the bull's fertility on the day.

A mature bull will be able to handle 25-30 cows, 15 cows are enough for a young bull in his first season. Any more than this and you're asking the bulls to do too much and can affect their fertility and indeed willingness to work. If you're asking a bull to do more than this, maybe you should use AI for a bit longer. We often see that farmers don't have enough bull power when using stock bulls and you can often see a dip in the calving season which relates to a couple of weeks after the bull is let off all because he is asked to do too much.