

Do your cows need to be dosed?

Milk yield can increase by up to 2 litres per cow per day by dosing them in mid-season. Occasionally we get comments from farmers at this time of year like “I dosed my cows and got an increase in 1 litre of milk per cow per day” or “I dosed my cows and could see no benefit”. The reality is that some farms have a heavy worm burden and by this time of year cows have picked up a large number of worms from being out at grass all year. There are a number of products on the market in Ireland for dosing dairy cows primarily for lungworms and stomach worms with zero milk withdrawal. These products are similarly priced and will cost around €5 per cow depending on the pack size you buy. The “white drenches” or Benzimidazole type products can also be used in dairy cows but require a milk withdrawal period. These may also be useful for farmers who want to dose for fluke also. The question as to whether or not it’s feasible to dose your cows now depends on a number of factors and while one farmer may see a benefit another may not.

Previous history can tell a lot about the worm burden on a farm and the necessity to dose. Bulk milk samples can be tested for the level of antibodies against lung worms and stomach worms amongst other diseases. This can often be a good starting point and high level of anti-bodies can suggest a high worm burden. The dosing regime last winter can also be an important factor. If cows received a good dose with the correct amount of product last winter there may not be as much need to dose them mid-season unless resistance to a product is an issue on a particular farm. If cows were dosed in previous years and response in terms of milk yield was observed then it is likely that this could be seen again.

Many farmers only dose their first calvers mid-season. This is because this group of animals will be under the most amount of pressure and most vulnerable within a herd as they are still settling in to the milking herd. If you have never dosed your cows mid-season before and are wondering whether or not to dose now then this group of animals can be a good starting point. So if you just dose the first calvers and get a response then it may be worthwhile to dose the rest of the herd.

The current warm, damp, humid weather is conducive to growth of these parasites on pastures and farmers should be aware of this for all categories of stock on the farm. Veterinary consultation should be sought before using any of these dosing products.