

## Key messages from Moorepark Open Day

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Dairy farmers identified the following key messages from the Moorepark Open Day.

- With a focus on reducing the environmental impact of dairy farming:
  - use high economic breeding index (EBI) genetics when breeding the dairy herd;
  - milk record to identify the best cows for breeding, and the poorest cows for culling;
  - use protected urea instead of CAN and a trailing shoe when you're spreading slurry;
  - most swards need to be reseeded every seven years or so to grow 15-16 tonnes of dry matter per hectare;
  - soil test at least every second year and use the information to put a proper fertiliser plan in place with good clover swards (up to 1kg/acre at reseeding) to reduce fertiliser nitrogen (N) input without reducing grass yield; and,
  - on a spring-calving herd, utilise early grass for protein requirements and reduce protein in meal.
- Graze your paddocks at 1,400kg-1,500kg to get good utilisation; higher than this take out bales.
- Put autumn grass plan in place in August to grow enough grass for extended autumn grazing.
- Provide good roadways and plenty of access to fresh water.

### Check your fodder supplies

PastureBase Ireland has a new fodder budgeting tool for planning your winter feed requirements. With the majority of winter feed harvested, now is the time to check whether you have enough on hand. The new budget tool allows you to calculate the total forage and concentrate

required for each stock type on your farm. You can alter key assumptions, such as length of winter or number of stock to be fed, to check how the outcome would be affected. Why not give it a try and see if you have enough fodder in stock for the winter?

## Time for lime

Now is the ideal time to apply lime to correct soil pH on mineral soils. Lime will bring many benefits from increasing the availability of soil nutrients (N, phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and sulphur (S)) to improving soil structure. Soils maintained at pH 6.3-6.5 will release up to 80kg N/ha/year from soil organic N reserves. This will help reduce chemical fertiliser N bills on farms by approximately €80/ha/year. Lime will increase the availability of soil P and is the first step in improving/building soil P levels cost effectively.

1. Check soil test results and apply lime to fields based on lime recommendations.
2. Target fields with the lowest soil pH first and



*Lime will help correct soil pH on mineral soils.*

- apply lime where the opportunity presents, for example, after grazing paddocks, after second-cut grass silage or at reseeding time.
3. Apply a maximum of 7.5t/ha (3t/ac) ground limestone in a single application.
- Remember that ground limestone is the cheapest and most cost-effective tool to control soil acidity in the long term.

## Don't ignore a summer SGC rise!

Is your bulk tank somatic cell count (SCC) starting to creep up slightly? If so, don't ignore it! Don't assume that small bulk tank SCC increases during the summer will 'settle down' – act now, and set your herd up for late lactation, with minimal mastitis infections and maximum milk production. What to do?

**Milk record the whole herd now,  
and identify any high SCC cows, i.e., SCC  
>200,000cells/ml.**



1. These high SCC cows should be marked and milked last to minimise disease spread.
2. Discuss a treatment plan with your vet – but remember that cure rates can range from 20-80% depending on various factors.
3. Remove the source of infection – dry off individual quarters, i.e., simply stop milking them. Do not use a dry cow tube. Consider culling if the cow is a repeat offender, i.e., has had a high SCC in two consecutive lactations.

## Reducing work in rearing calves

How much milk will you carry and mix for a 100-cow herd, 25% replacement rate and surplus calves sold at four weeks of age? 24,000 litres in total! Or 2,400 10-litre buckets. It is not surprising therefore that there is a lot of debate around investing in either an automatic calf milk feeder or a milk trolley

and pump. There is a substantial difference in cost between both products and **Table 1** looks at what tasks are removed using the three feeding methods. Of the nine tasks listed, the bucket feeding method requires all tasks to be completed. The automatic feeder completely removes three of the tasks and

removes some of the cleaning of the equipment (cleaned internally, but not externally). The last four tasks listed must be completed, irrespective of the feeding method chosen.

Before making a decision, you need to consider:

1. Suitability of your current calf sheds for rearing calves: automatic feeders or trolleys will not compensate for poor ventilation and insufficient calf space.

2. What labour will be available to feed calves next spring?
3. Can you afford the investment based on your expected cash flow?

Take some time now to decide which option is best for you and your farm. Doing nothing is not an option for most farmers. Bringing milk to calves by buckets should be a thing of the past, especially with the technologies like the milk trolley and automatic feeders available today.

**Table 1: Daily calf rearing tasks and method of feeding.**

Daily calf rearing tasks	Bucket	Auto feeder	Milk trolley*
1. Carrying milk	Y	N	N
2. Carrying milk powder	Y	Y	Y
3. Mixing calf milk powder	Y	N	N
4. Waiting for water to fill	Y	N	Y
5. Cleaning feeding equipment	Y	Y (internal)	Y
6. Bedding pens	Y	Y	Y
7. Checking calves	Y	Y	Y
8. Feeding concentrates	Y	Y	Y
9. Treating sick calves	Y	Y	Y

\*With pump and mixing bowl.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Display your Eircode

Everything should be done to prevent injury and ill health. However, when an emergency arises it is crucial to call the emergency services immediately using 112/999. It is vital to have an Eircode readily available as this allows emergency and medical services to locate an exact rural location speedily. It is also advised to have the Eircodes of elderly relatives and neighbours available if needed.

Display your Eircode in a prominent and accessible place on the farm and save in mobile



Display your Eircode.

phones. Undertaking first-aid training is also strongly advised to deal with emergencies.



## August grazing plan

It is not uncommon for many dairy farmers to end up with a lower supply of grass than they would like entering the autumn. August is a crucial month to build grass supply for autumn. Central to this is the lengthening of the rotation to 28-30 days by September 1. This can be achieved in different ways, including:

1. Return of the silage area into grazing: the simplest way, but not always an option.
2. Removal of non-milking stock from the platform and/or sale of empty cows.

3. Introduction of additional feed to help slow down the rotation: baled silage, meal or both can be used.

It is better that action is taken earlier than later, before grass growth becomes much slower. You have six weeks to build grass covers, as growth rates (supply) will be less than what is eaten (demand) by mid September generally. The autumn grazing targets for August are outlined in **Table 2**.

**Table 2: Autumn grazing cover targets.**

Date	Cover/cow (kg DM/cow)	Average farm cover (kg DM/ha)	Rotation length
<b>Stocking rate of 2.5 LU/ha</b>			
August 1	180	450	20 days
Mid August	200	500	25 days
September 1	300	750	30 days
<b>Stocking rate of 3.0 LU/ha</b>			
August 1	180	550	20 days
Mid August	250	750	25 days
September 1	330	990	30 days
<b>Stocking rate of 3.5 LU/ha</b>			
August 1	190	665	20 days
Mid August	220	770	25 days
September 1	280	980	30 days

## Date for your diary

### National winter milk event – ‘Building a sustainable winter milk system’

Teagasc Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford – September 4, 2019 from 11.00am to 2.00pm

Farm tour plus interactive sessions with expert speakers, including practical demonstrations.

Topics will include: review of Johnstown Castle herd performance; autumn grazing management; breeding cows for lifetime performance; improving feed efficiency; managing cow health and fertility; multispecies swards for grazing dairy herds; and, improving soil nutrient profiles.

**All welcome – admission is free.**