

Take action on high covers

Edited by
Tom O'Dwyer,
Head of Dairy
Knowledge Transfer



PastureBase Ireland figures for the last three months show that, on average, there has been surplus grass on dairy farms (above 190kg DM/LU).

This suggests that pre-grazing covers are higher than the target of 1,400kg DM/ha.

Higher covers have higher stem content, lower leaf content and lower digestibility.

Every 4% reduction in grass digestibility reduces milk solids yield by about 5%.

Grazing high covers will also result in under grazing (poor clean-out, not grazing down to 4cm). This has negative implications for grass quality for the rest of summer grazing.

Ideally, surplus grass should be converted into

round bale silage. Some farmers pre cut this strong material as a means to try to rectify the problem.

However, this is not removing the surplus grass from the platform. Many trials here, and in Australia and New Zealand, have examined pre cutting and broadly the results demonstrate a reduction in milk protein content, a reduction in milk solids yield, and less grass grown when grass is pre cut. The higher the level of grass cover pre cut, the more pronounced the negative effects are. The reason? The cow's ability to choose or select the grass of higher digestibility is removed through pre cutting.

Heifer weights

Having replacement heifers at the correct weight for their age at the start of August is critical to their long-term future in the dairy herd.

February-born weanling and yearling heifers should be 30% and 70%, respectively, of their pre-calving bodyweight on August 1, if they're to be successfully calved at two years of age. So assuming a pre-calving weight of 550kg, this equates to approximately 165kg for the

weanling and at least 385kg for the in-calf heifer. Identify lighter heifers for priority grazing and supplementation.

As a rough rule of thumb, separate heifers that are 10% or more below target – for weanlings this is heifers weighing 150kg or less and for yearlings it's heifers weighing 350kg or less. There is still plenty of time to make sure that they catch up with their heavier counterparts before winter.

No benefit in additional protein

Teagasc Ruminant Nutritionist, Brian Garry, recommends that dairy farmers consider the protein content of concentrates when making their purchasing decision. According to Brian: "With high forage quality with sufficient protein, there is no response to additional protein, as energy intake is limiting. Instead, you should

choose a high energy ration (UFL value of >0.95 as fed) to ensure adequate energy supply to utilise the nitrogen (N) in grass effectively".

Table 1 shows the recommended protein specification to be used to feed to dairy cows at a moderate rate (up to 3kg/head/day).

Table 1: Ration crude protein level for three yield levels.

	Ration CP (%)		
Milk solids yield	2.0-2.2	1.8-2.0	1.6-1.8
High-quality grass	14	12	12

No lame excuses for autumn 2019

The cost of dairy cow lameness could be up to €300 per case, not to mention reduced animal welfare and the hassle factor of lame cows. Recent research by Teagasc Moorepark has shown a lameness rate of 4% in spring, and over 7% in autumn across a group of dairy herds. Cows with problems in the spring were 10 times more likely to re-appear as lame in the autumn.

The main lameness causes (**Figure 1**) for these grazing herds were mechanical (bruising, white line disease, ulcers, overgrown digits), as opposed to infectious (Mortellaro, foul in the foot) in nature. The priorities for grazing herds are therefore related to surfaces and managing cow flow around milking times. Now is a good time to address issues on the farm before we move into the high-risk time of

year. Some things to implement are as follows.

- Problem spots: seemingly small problem areas like standing water, poorly drained corners, broken surfaces, shading by overgrown tree branches, etc., can cause major lameness problems; identify and fix these as a first step.
- Road surfaces: are they good enough? Small pebbles and grit are the main cause of white line disease. If this is being seen at hoof trimming then there is an issue to be fixed. Surfaces should be smooth and finished with a well compacted surface material. Take an hour or two to walk the farm roads and note the quality of surface, getting a second opinion if possible.
- Interface area: the step from roadway to concrete can often be a cause of lameness due to pebbles being dragged onto the hard surface. Laying 8-10m of material like AstroTurf at yard or tunnel entrances/exits has worked very well for many farms.
- Road verges: a common problem is build-up of grass/sods along the road over time, which impedes drainage. Remove these or at least break regular openings to provide drainage.
- Cow flow in and out of the parlour: are there simple modifications that could be made? For example, removing sharp turns and providing matting on narrow parlour exits. Check the size of your collecting yard – providing more than 1.5m² per cow reduces stress on cows' feet.
- Hoof trimming: lameness is a repeat-offender problem. All cows that were treated during spring or have previous history should be drafted for selective trimming before mid August. Check all cows for rear hoof condition at milking. Trim overgrown digits before clinical lameness emerges.
- Foot bath: for infectious disease control (where identified) and prevention; follow a clear protocol for product use and schedule of treatment.

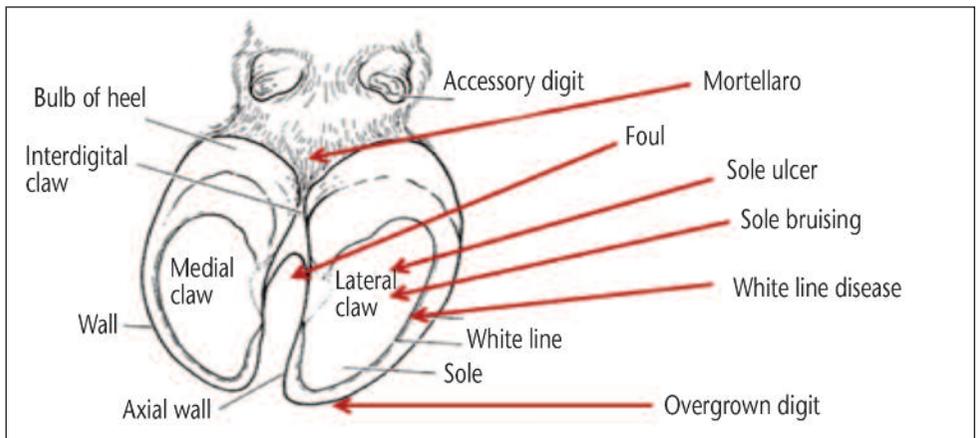


FIGURE 1: Normal hoof and sites of common lameness problems.

Time for a change

CellCheck recommends that liners are changed every 2,000 milkings, or every six months, whichever comes first. This is to help prevent mastitis and ensure that maximum milk yields are being harvested. Cluster liners are designed to flex and squeeze the teat during each pulsation cycle. This massages teats and maintains blood supply. While liners are working, they begin to lose tension, absorb fat and hold bacteria. After too many milkings, this can reduce the speed and completeness of milking, resulting in a loss in milk yield. It also increases teat end damage and the spread of mastitis bacteria. Fatigued rubber can also hold bacteria and this can increase the total bacterial count (TBC) if dirt is being trapped. To calculate how many days it takes to reach 2,000 milkings, see page 52 of the 'CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control'. For example, for the average Irish milk recording herd of 102 cows, if the full herd has been milking since March 1 in a 12-unit swing over parlour, the milking liners will have clocked up over 2,600 milkings by July 31. These liners had completed 2,000 milkings by June 26! Alternatively, estimate how often you should change your liners, based on the number of rows you're milking (see Table 2).

Table 2: How often you should change your liners based on the number of rows you milk.

Number of rows	Days between changes (twice a day milking)
6	167
7	143
8	125
9	111
10	100
11	91
12	83
13	77
14	71

So, if you're milking eight rows of cows, you should be changing your liners every 125 days, which is approximately every four months.

And if you're milking 11 rows of cows, you should be changing your liners every 91 days, which is approximately every three months.

For more details, see www.cellcheck.ie or watch the CellCheck video 'When Should I Change My Liners?' online.

HEALTH & SAFETY

The most dangerous month

July is the most dangerous month of the year on farms. For the 15-year period 2004-2018, almost 17% of farm deaths occurred during July. This is double the average per month. The principal causes of accidents in July are: vehicle and machine use (particularly tractors and loaders); falls from



Use three contact points when getting up/down from a tractor.

heights and falling objects; cattle; and, slurry. During this month in particular, give attention to operating machinery safely. Never get into a 'crush zone' and always operate a vehicle from the driver's seat.

