Smarter Milking

Milking is the most important job on a dairy farm, taking up to one-third of the total labour input.

With herd size increasing and ever-larger milking units, the demands on the milker are growing. Working smarter can help. Teagasc, in association with the Farm Relief Service (FRS), Animal Health Ireland and the dairy co-ops, is running a series of Smarter Milking events across the country during July.

These events will outline how dairy farmers and their staff can implement techniques to enable a more efficient and safer milking process which delivers high-quality milk and greater profit. Farmers will be able to discuss the milking system with the host farmers.

These events will focus on five aspects of the milking process:

- Getting cows in and out (cows flow)
- Milking technique (doing it right)
- Producing high quality milk
- Saving energy and money
- Reducing time spent on milking

Stand 1: Jim Dockery from Farm Relief Services (FRS) will focus on getting the cows from the paddle or shed into the collecting yard through the milking parlour and back to paddock or shed again. He will look at areas such as cow road infrastructure and preventing bottlenecks. Jim will also focus on the collecting yard, back gate and drafting cows after milking.

Stand 2: Paudraí O’Connor from Teagasc, will focus on what happens in the milking parlour, including preparing the parlour, the milker and cows for milking. I will also address cluster attachment and removal and techniques to avoid repetitive strain injury. Efficient milking and correct application of teat spray will also be covered.

Stand 3: is about producing high-quality milk and this will be covered by co-op personnel. The focus will be on reducing trichloroethylene (TCE) and chlorine residues in milk. Washing and cleaning the milking equipment, ie the milking machine and bulk tank, will be covered.

Stand 4: will cover saving energy and money and this will be led by John Upton from Teagasc. John will discuss energy efficiency on dairy farms, with an emphasis on electricity usage, night day rates while explaining how to benchmark your energy costs against other farms. Milk cooling is the largest energy consumer on dairy farms and pre-cooling and refrigeration will be discussed. Water heating and the use of variable speed drive (VFD) vacuum pumps are other areas where dairy farmers can make savings on energy consumption. The benefits of reducing electricity consumption for the farmer include lower production costs and also a reduction in carbon footprint.

Stand 5: is saving time around milking and the content of this stand will be covered by the local Teagasc dairy advisor. This includes the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs), for example preparing for milking, milking routine and washing up after milking. A SOP is a document consisting of step-by-step instructions taught to complete a particular job or procedure on the dairy farm. A well-written SOP will provide direction, improve communication and reduce training time.

A well-written SOP will provide direction, improve communication and reduce training time. With labour size increasing on many farms and the use of hired help more commonplace, the use of SOPs will help streamline the operation.

Labeling of milking components and having a set place for items used at milking will also allow for a more efficient milking to take place. Having a well-organised milking parlour and dairy will allow the task of milking cows much faster to be completed.

A number of Smart Milking events will take place in July. Check the Teagasc website for details.