

The 60 hour challenge

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Summary

- The 16 members of the Greenfield Farm Academy (GFA 1) from various parts of Ireland developed the **60 hour** challenge to reduce the hours worked during the calving period to less than 70 hours/week.
- Actual hours worked were 69.5 hours/manager/farm owner.
- Through better organisation during the dry period and improved personal time management, some group members are aiming to achieve a 60 hour working week in spring 2020.
- Some members accept they have to work 70 hours/week in the peak period but that the challenge reduced their hours worked by becoming more focused on the day-to-day planning and management.

Introduction

Greenfield Academy 1 is a group of farmers (n=16) who want to efficiently expand their dairy herds (average herd size 300), and set up additional dairy units. With almost 33% of the total workload on a spring calving farm occurring in spring, the group set an eight-week challenge to cap work at 60 hours per week in the spring of 2019. A one-page worksheet was developed by the group, submitted weekly, via WhatsApp, by each member for the eight weeks. Most of the group had employed labour by contracting or full time labour which was not measured.

Greenfield Academy 1 “60 Hour Challenge” Worksheet

60 Hour Challenge	
	Time
Leave the house	AM
Start time of milking	AM
Daily finish time	PM
Number of straight hours sleep	Hrs
No. of nights out calving (last 7 days)	
No. of night checks on cows calving (last 7 nights)	
Hours worked/day	Hrs
Hours worked/week	Hrs
½ day/week off (yes/no)	
Office work — day or night (hrs)	Day/Hrs
Did you get all your work done this week that you had planned (yes/no)	
Did you have a hot meal every day?	
Mood (Score 1–5) this week 5 is the best mood you could be in	
Reason for the level of mood; e.g. power outage, calf scour	
What saved time this week?	
What caused hardship this week?	

Factors to consider:

- Excellent weather of spring 2019.
- Variation in night calving management (contracted/no checks/a number of checks per night)
- The Hawthorn Effect informs us that people behave differently when monitored so participation alone may be responsible for some of the reported behaviour.

Table 1. Results of 60 hour challenge

	Average	Range
Avg. hours worked/week	69.5 hrs	50–82
Avg. hours worked/person/day excl. breaks	10 hrs	9.7–11.20 hrs
Avg. time leaving house	6.20 am	6–6.44 am
Avg. time milking start	7.00 am	6–8 am
Avg. time daily finish	6.23 pm	6.09–6.45 pm
Avg. hours slept	6.17 hrs	5.78–6.75 hrs
Busiest weeks — (week ending)	15 & 22 Feb	
Day/Night office work	mostly day	
Avg. office work week	0.5–1 day	
Avg. days off over the 8 week period	4	0–7 days
Mood score (5 is the highest score)	4.5	

The most reported **time-savers** for the period were:

- the exceptionally fine weather allowing night and day grazing.
- being able to sell bull calves.
- Once-a-day feeding of calves from three weeks of age.
- several members had grass breaks set up ahead of the cows.

Questions raised by facilitator of the challenge:

- Is exhaustion, poor organisation or more help needed on farm causing the long hours?
- Where can efficiencies be gained: on farm or personal approach?
- What spring preparations should be carried out and when?
- How can mood be managed in poor working conditions e.g. spring 2018?

Examples of **time pressure creators** included, inability to sell male calves (reported as greatest hardship), broken machinery and tiredness.

Conclusions

The “60 Hour Challenge” was created and carried out by the GFA 1 discussion group for an eight week period during spring calving 2019. On average, the 60 hour target was exceeded (avg. hours worked = 69.5 hrs). It varied every week, but (50%) worked greater than 70 hours per week.