An examination of labour time-use on spring calving dairy farms in Ireland

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The seasonal workload associated with spring calving dairy farms, combined with increasing herd sizes has led to a renewed focus on labour time-use/ efficiency on dairy farms. The objective of this study was to examine labour time-use on spring calving dairy farms in the spring and summer seasons. Eighty-two spring calving dairy farms recorded their labour input on one alternating day each week using a smartphone app from January to June 2019. Any farm labour not captured by the app was recorded through a weekly online survey. Farms were categorised into 1 of 4 herd size categories (HSC): 50 to 90 cows (HSC 1); 91 to 139 cows (HSC 2); 140 to 239 cows (HSC 3); and ≥ 240 cows (HSC 4). For total farm hours, there was no statistical difference between HSC 1 (1883 h) and HSC 2 (2158 h), but predictably as HSC increased, total farm hours increased (HSC 3: 2558 h, HSC 4: 3230 h). 'Milking' was the most time consuming task representing 31% of farm labour input making it an important focus for potential improvements in efficiency. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of labour use during the busiest time of year on spring calving farms, pointing to where greater labour efficiency gains can be made.