

Second round of grazing

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The second rotation should begin when the grass is almost right for grazing, i.e., 1,100-1,200kg DM/ha. It is important to walk your farm and keep an eye on the first three to four paddocks that were grazed this spring. Watching what is happening in terms of growth on these paddocks will determine whether you will speed up or slow down grazing of the paddocks at the end of the

first round in April. For those farmers who carry out pasture measurements, try to target a cover of about 150-160kg DM/cow on the farm at the start of the second round of grazing. The farm cover should not fall below 550kg DM/ha. Farms with a higher stocking rate on the milking platform should not let the average farm cover drop below 600kg DM/ha.

Apply P and K?

Most dairy farms need to have up to 60-70 units of nitrogen (N) per acre applied by early April at average or higher stocking rates. The next target on such farms is to have 90-100 units of fertiliser N/ac applied by May 1. Remember that many farms are deficient in

phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) (and sulphur) so applying compound fertiliser, e.g., 18:6:12 + S (two bags/acre) is recommended. Application of fertiliser P and K will also help damaged pasture recover. Phosphorous in particular is very important for growth of grass and root repair in spring.

Factors affecting milk fat at pasture

- Up to 60% of the difference in milk fat content between herds is due to breeding. The genetic base (zero) in the Economic Breeding Index (EBI) is 3.90%. Milk fat rises rapidly in response to selecting bulls with high positive deviations on fat (e.g., 0.15% or higher).
- Stage of lactation inevitably affects milk fat content due to dilution of solids content. As a guide, fat percentage tends to run at 0.35 to 0.45 units below annual herd average during peak. Therefore figures of 3.55-3.65% are normal for herds at 4.0% annually, whereas 4.20% in April/May is more typical for higher solids herds. This is important to highlight because milk fats in the 3.50% range at peak are often assumed to indicate a nutrition issue when in fact they may be quite normal for the herd in question. See **Table 1**.
- From a nutrition perspective, the important factors for milk fat at grass are high dry matter intake, adequate fibre (NDF) content, concentrate type, and lipid (oil content) of the diet.
 - ▶ If it is unlikely there is an issue with too

Table 1: Annual versus April-May milk fat content.

	Herd A	Herd B
Annual milk fat content	4.00%	4.60%
Typical Apr-May milk fat	3.55-3.65%	4.15-4.25%

- little NDF in the diet, then adding extra fibre (straw) will have little benefit on high grass intakes, even if milk fat appears low.
- ▶ There have been instances in recent years of herds experiencing temporary dips in milk fat in the second/third grazing round. The likely culprit in the diet is high polyunsaturated lipid content of second round grazing but more work is needed to identify the specific risk factors, e.g., grass varieties, interaction with supplements.
 - ▶ Concentrates that have a high level of rapidly fermentable starch ingredients (e.g., wheat) can reduce milk fat production by lowering rumen pH and depressing fibre digestion. It is advised to include high fibre ingredients, e.g., beet pulp/soya hulls, in grazing rations. Limit inclusion of high oil products.

Problem cows

Submitting cows for serving is an important aspect of the breeding season with a target of 90% submitted in the first three weeks. No matter how well calving has gone, there is a group of cows that have hit a bump or two on the road be it a hard calving, retained afterbirth,

milk fever (lots of this in spring 2020), mastitis

or a displaced abomasum

(LDA or RDA).

Any one or combination of these

shocks to the system can compromise fertility in the

subsequent breeding



season through delayed resumption of the cyclicity. Herd owners need to be vigilant not to let these cows slip through the net resulting in their premature exit from the herd.

While it is still fresh in the mind, make a list of the cows that had issues if you haven't already done so. These problem cows should be examined by your vet. This will ensure that they are actively cycling and if not, allow you to chart a course of action to maximise their opportunities to go back in calf and hopefully remain in the herd.

The number of cows that will fall into this category will be small, so examination and treatment cost will also be small. Replacing them with heifers that cost €1,500 to rear and won't leave a return until their second lactation is an expensive business. It's a hidden cost that often goes unnoticed. So identify the problem cows, get them checked before the breeding season starts to give them every chance.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Slurry and machinery safety

We have had an extremely long winter and a particularly wet spring. Slurry and fertiliser spreading are high-risk jobs in April. Always pick a windy day, open all doors and outlets and keep all persons away when agitating and handling slurry. Take care when working around slurry tank openings and close when not in use. Make sure that the power drives of spreaders and agitators are fully covered. Always stay well clear of moving parts. Pay particular attention to the safety of



Protect slurry openings.

persons in farmyards and roadways, as tractor and machine movements can kill as a result of knockdowns.

Keep control of mastitis!



At this time of year, a lot of you will be tired from a busy calving season and the last thing you will want to read is another list of jobs that you must do! So this article is a gentle reminder of some important facts to help reduce the risk of mastitis around calving.

The period around calving is the highest risk period for mastitis to occur. It is a critical time in determining the level of herd infection for the rest of lactation. Therefore, the milk quality for the whole season depends on success of mastitis control around calving. Cows are more susceptible to infections at this time as their natural defence mechanisms are low. This allows new infections to occur or subclinical infections which have persisted through the dry period to flare up into clinical cases. A build-up in the number of bacteria in the environment as the calving season progresses puts further pressure on the cow's immune system.

Some important tips to help minimise these risks:

1. Calve in a clean environment – keep calving pens clean, fresh and dry. Avoid calving on slats or in cubicles. Outdoor pads must have minimal manure contamination, be sheltered and well drained.
2. Identify clinical cases as soon as possible as early identification reduces the risk of severe cases developing and the risk of spread between other cows and it also reduces the risk of developing chronic infection. Each quarter needs to be carefully checked.
3. Take your time moving and milking freshly calved heifers and cows. Remember at this time, teats are more tender and therefore more susceptible to injury and infection. Ensure all quarters are milked out completely and that

sometimes stressed or agitated cows may need a let-down hormone (oxytocin) prescribed by your veterinary practitioner. Don't use incomplete milking as a method of control of milk fever. Avoid over and under milking.

4. Consider collecting milk samples for culture to identify bacteria before treatment starts. These samples can be frozen for up to four months and may be submitted for culture later if the number of clinical cases increases.
5. It might sound obvious, but clearly marking treated cows is so important to avoid mistakes, that can easily happen especially when people are tired and busy. Set up a system that works for you and ensure that all regular and relief milking staff are familiar with it. Have a written procedure in a visible location for all staff to see. If antibiotic milk does get into bulk tank, notify your co-op immediately to avoid being fined.
6. Where possible, milk clinical cases last but if this is not possible, sanitise the cluster after milking an infected cow by firstly running water through the cluster for 30 seconds and then dipping in a peracetic acid solution.
7. Record all clinical cases to track mastitis control. If more than 5% of your cows get mastitis within the first month of calving, it should be investigated. Consult your veterinary practitioner for advice on appropriate treatment and always complete the course of antibiotics prescribed.
8. After year-round teat disinfection, milk recording is the next most important tool in dealing with high somatic cell count (SCC) and mastitis. Milk recording within the first month after calving is very important to monitor how the dry cow season went and to identify cows with high SCC as early as possible.