

We're not making enough use of milk-recording

We're falling behind in our use of this tool, which can yield financial and disease control benefits

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Why milk recording?

The first piece of information about milk recording dates back to 20th century France. The first full-scale trials were carried out between 1900 and 1910, with the first milk recording syndicate coming into operation in the Seine Maritime Department in the Normandy region of Northern France in 1907.

The first milk recording in Ireland took place, not much later, in 1910. Milk recording is an important management tool in dairy farming, however, in Ireland the level of milk recording is disappointingly low (Table 1).

There are many benefits to milk recording and more dairy farmers in Ireland should be doing it, because it allows farmers to:

- Track the best and worst producers, allowing you to identify superior cows that are more suitable for breeding replacements.
- Track somatic cell count (SCC) of each cow, which will facilitate management of repeat offenders. This, in turn, can improve milk revenue as cows with high SCC milk less.
- If you are in the unfortunate situation of having a reactor to a TB test, milk recording records increase the compensation available for animals that have to be culled.
- Milk recording results feed into

ICBF's genetic evaluations, which improve EBI reliability. If you are not milk recording, you are not allowed to complain about EBI (if you are inclined to do so!)

If this is not enough to convince you, then consider this – recent analysis performed by the Agricultural Economics and Farm Surveys Department of Teagasc in Athenry and the School of Business and Economics in NUIG found that:

- Milk recording helps farmers to select a better performing herd that will yield approximately 400l per cow extra per annum (€120 per cow at 30c/l).
- Milk recording reduces avoidable costs associated with poor udder health by identifying cows at risk of mastitis and reducing the herd level SCC by approximately 25%.

From improvements in milk quality from both fat and protein percentages, better cows and SCC through better management, using milk recording results in better milk prices being paid. This equates to at least a 4% increase in gross margin.

Then, there is the issue of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which is fast approaching. Antimicrobial resistance, or antibiotic resistance, is the term used to describe infection-causing bacteria that can survive exposure to an antibiotic that would have previously killed it.



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Table 1: Proportion of cows and herds milk recording in a selection of significant dairy producing countries (ICAR 2018).

Country	Number of recorded cows	Number of recorded herds	% of total cows recorded	% of total herds recording
Denmark	518,682	2,850	91	91
The Netherlands	1,471,431	14,784	90	86
New Zealand	3,615,000	8,242	72	71
Norway	219,360	8,331	93	94
Average	N/A	N/A	87	86
Ireland	699,520	6,191	51	35



Investigating an outbreak

When Mastitis/high SCC strikes, it can have a profound impact on the smooth running of a dairy herd. Farmers going through it often say that the mental challenge is as hard as the financial burden. When investigating a mastitis outbreak in a herd with milk recording, versus a herd without milk recording, the absence of recording can result in a delay of months to even years before the problem is controlled.

What to look for

The pattern of infection can be seen from your farm summary sheet. You can see how many cows from each lactation are infected and if the infection is spreading through the herd or is confined to a particular lactation. The problem cow sheet is a great tool, as it will rank the cows in order of percentage contribution to the bulk tank based on SCC and milk yield.

We can also see if these cows were a problem in the previous lactation, as the average SCC for the last lactation is highlighted in this report. The CellCheck farm summary report is also very helpful and it shows the overall SCC performance of the herd.

In this report, an analysis of the previous dry cow treatment is assessed, assuming the first milk recording is carried out within 60 days of the first cow calving. This report highlights how the dry cow procedure went and, most importantly, how the in-calf heifers have performed at calving in relation to SCC counts.

As a tool to monitor, maintain and most importantly, an insurance policy when an outbreak occurs to preserve optimum herd performance, milk recording is absolutely vital. Remember – you can get help from your advisor in interpreting your reports.

– Don Crowley, Dairy Advisor,
Milk Quality Specialist, Teagasc, Clonakilty

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Resistance to antibiotics is a very real threat, as we have only a limited number of antibiotic groups to treat both human and animal infection. It is estimated that AMR will be responsible for the deaths of up to 50,000 people each year by 2050.

In light of increasing resistance, new European legislation will take effect from January 28, 2022 (just under two years from now). This legislation will mean that the administration of dry cow tubes to all quarters of cows in the herd, or blanket dry cow therapy, will no longer be allowed. Selective dry cow therapy (SDCT) will have to be practiced instead.

SDCT is when only cows that have known infections receive antibiotic tubes – those that do not have an infection will receive teat sealer only.

The new legislation targets blanket dry cow therapy, as this is seen as an unnecessary or unjustified use of antibiotics, which could be fanning the flames of the resistance fire. Use of antibiotics to treat known infection will still be allowed. However, it will require individual cow evidence of infection in the form of milk recording data and culture and sensitivity analysis for your farm.

For those already milk recording, remember that to get full benefit



Milk recording reduces avoidable costs associated with poor udder health by identifying cows at risk of mastitis

from your first recording, it should be completed within 60 days of the first cow calving at the latest. This is to ensure that important information relating to cure rates over the dry period can be calculated accurately for your herd.

This has always been important information, but it will be of even greater importance in the coming SDCT era. Furthermore, milk recording early in lactation can help to head off any potential problems that may have arisen. Early detection can help prevent infections from becoming established and also prevent further spread in the herd.

It should be obvious by now that milk recording won't cost you money. In fact, it will actually make you money.

Yes, there is a time and hassle factor associated with the process, but the benefits far outweigh the negatives. It takes the same time to milk a good herd of cows as a bad one, so you might as well be milking a good one!

If you are not already milk recording but are interested in starting, the following are the contacts that you will need:

- Munster Bovine: 022 43228.
- Progressive Genetics: 01 4502142.
- Tipperary Co-op: 062 33111.

High EBI herds

"When advising new entrants, I always recommend that they source their stock from high EBI milk recorded herds.

These milk recorded herds provide the best of genetics to underpin the establishment of the new entrants farm,

helping them to achieve a milk price well ahead of the co-op average.

This advantage is of great importance, as it can help to cushion the new business if milk price is low at any stage during the development phase. It could take 10 years to breed the same capability into an average herd. By selecting from high EBI milk recorded herds, new

entrants can propel themselves into the upper tiers of milk solids performance within their respective co-ops, getting them off to a very strong start in their new enterprise."

– Patrick Gowing,
Specialist Dairy Advisor, Teagasc
Dairy Expansion Service