

## Start milk recording this spring

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Dairy Knowledge Transfer

This year is a very important one for dairy farmers in preparing for the new veterinary medicines legislation that will be in place

from January 2022. This legislation will mean that dairy farmers will need to change how they use antibiotics, and antibiotics can no longer be used as a preventative measure, i.e., when drying off uninfected cows. Ultimately, this new legislation is about protecting antibiotics and doing all that we can to make sure they remain effective in humans.

If you are not milk recording, you need to get started. Milk recording is the best way of identifying cows that need antibiotic treatment at drying off. Completing a milk recording within 60 days of calving shows you how successful the dry cow treatment was at curing



infections and identifies cows that picked up new infections during the dry period. Identify any cows that had a high somatic cell count (SCC) last

year and pay close attention to them when they calve for any evidence of clinical mastitis. Identify which pathogens are present in your herd by building a profile from any clinical cases that occur during the year. Aseptic milk samples should be collected from any clinical case before you start treatment. These can be frozen for several months, and then as you collect a number of them, they can all be sent to the laboratory together. Record all clinical cases of mastitis on the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) database. The more information you can gather on each cow during the lactation, the better prepared you will be for 2022.



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## Feeding the young calf

Guidelines on feeding the young calf adequately was one of the topics covered at January's CalfCare webinars run in conjunction with Animal Health Ireland (AHI). Emer Kennedy, Teagasc Moorepark spoke about milk feeding guidelines for young calves: "During the first weeks of life, the calf is entirely dependent on milk as a source of nutrition. On farms where there are no health issues, such as Johne's disease, calves should be fed transition milk. Transition milk is milkings two to six from freshly calved cows. While antibodies in transition milk decline with each milking, it is still a better feed source than whole milk or good-quality milk replacer for calves who have received their colostrum feed. Although no additional antibodies can be absorbed across the gut wall after 24 hours of age, there is a local effect and

feeding at least four feeds of transition milk, after the colostrum feed, has been shown to reduce the incidence of illness in calves". After the calf has received all feeds of transition milk, feeding either whole milk or good-quality milk replacer results in similar growth rates. If feeding whole milk, waste milk, milk with antibiotic residue or high SCC milk should not be fed.

Continuing Emer said: "As a guide, the quantity of milk fed to calves should be gradually increased over the first week of life to ensure that calves are drinking six litres per day by the time that they are six days old. We recommend that calves are fed 15% of their birth bodyweight, so for a 40kg calf that is equal to six litres/day, which is divided into two equal feeds for the first four weeks of life. Subsequently they can be fed milk either twice or once a day. If receiving one daily feed of milk, calves must also be thoroughly checked a second time during the day and fed concentrate at this time".

### Meal for the young calf

Teagasc's ruminant nutritionist, Joe Patton addressed the topic of feeding meal to the young calf: "When managing the nutrition of young calves on milk, it is very important to remember that we must develop the rumen as well as grow the calf. No matter what the weight at weaning, if the digestive system is not ready for a forage diet, then calves will suffer setbacks post weaning. Having good rumen development ensures a much smoother transition at this critical phase of growth. Rumen development begins by getting calves to eat solid feed; high starch feed works best because it provides the right type of energy to grow the rumen wall".

Starter concentrate should be introduced within the first seven to ten days. Calves will consume very little ration initially, but it is important to kick-start rumen development. Starter coarse rations with high cereal and protein content should be used; molasses can increase palatability.

Compounded rations can be introduced when calves have settled into eating ration. The

change to pelleted ration should be gradual to prevent gorging and bloating. Calf rations should have a crude protein content of 18% and a net energy value of >0.96 UFL per kilo. At weaning, the calf should have been eating at least 1kg of ration per day for the previous four to five days. It is important to make sure that milk intake is phased out gradually to encourage concentrate intake.

In addition to meal, good-quality long forage should be made available in feed racks for young calves. The intake of roughage will be small at only 20% of solid feed intake, but it encourages foraging behaviour. Choice of roughage available is important; clean coarse straw chopped to a length of 30-40mm is ideal. Excessive intake of long fibre should be avoided, as it can cause poor digestion and result in pot-bellied calves. There is a greater risk of this occurring when feeding hay rather than chopped straw.

Joe concluded: "Finally, clean fresh water should be provided at all times from an early age. This should be from a piped drinker and not from a standing source".

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## Complete the first milk recording by St Patrick's Day

Spring 2021 is your last opportunity to start collecting a full year's milk recording data before the change in regulation on the use of dry cow antibiotics at drying off. According to Teagasc's Don Crowley, the first milk recording should be completed within 60 days of the

start of calving. Cows with a high SCC this early in lactation are likely to have carried an udder infection through from the previous lactation or acquired a new infection before they calved.

Don said: "It's the start of building up a picture of udder health for your herd, which will be essential in deciding on the treatments that you're going to need at the end of the 2021 lactation".

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## Lameness around calving time

According to Waterford-based Ned Dunphy of Farm Relief Services and veterinary surgeon Ger Cusack of Comeragh Veterinary Practice, lameness is an often-overlooked aspect of dairy cow health. Early intervention when lameness occurs is critical to success. Close to calving, they recommend the following two actions:

1. Introduce heifers to the herd well before calving. This will reduce fighting with dominant cows and reduce stress on heifers' hooves. Gradual build-up of concentrates in the seven to ten days post calving is important for hoof health, as well as rumen stability, particularly where more than 4kg per day is fed in early lactation.
2. Mind the cow after calving. She is very vulnerable to developing lameness in the immediate post-calving period. Keep calved cows close to the milking parlour for a minimum of 48 hours after they calve to avoid walking long distances.



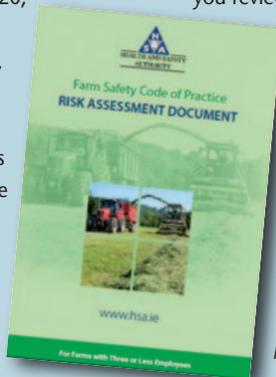
Cows are more prone to lameness post calving.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Review your risk assessment



February brings an increase in workload and associated risk to the farm. In 2020, 19 farm workplace deaths occurred, three in the childhood, six in the 17-64 years, and 10 in the 65 year old or higher age categories. Each of these fatalities is a huge tragedy. Let us all in the farming sector aim for zero accidents and make every possible effort to prevent deaths and serious injuries in 2021. This involves being alert to possible



dangers and taking preventative action. Have you reviewed your risk assessment document for 2021? It is a legal duty to do this at least annually. Farmers tend to mainly use the farm vehicle, machinery and buildings pages. To do a comprehensive risk assessment review, go through the complete document, particularly the children and older farmers risk assessment section. Most importantly, follow-up with actions.  
*Implement your risk assessment.*