

Plan ahead for feed security

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Dairy farmers face another year of huge uncertainty due to the current geopolitical situation.

While predictions on prices and availability of inputs are dominating conversations, it is very important that individuals take whatever steps are feasible for their own farm, to improve the security of their feed stocks for the coming season and next winter.

Remember, some modest changes can add up to significant benefits over time, so plan and act early. Some simple points are:

- grazing grass at the correct growth stage can save 1-2kg of concentrate for no change in milk output – maximise the quality of grass in every grazing;
- silage is still cheaper than meal at 20 cent v 44 cent per kg dry matter;
- plan silage requirements for next winter: how much is left in the pits? How much do you have to grow this season? – complete a forward budget for silage;
- first-cut silage requires at least 80 units of nitrogen (N) and potassium (K), and 16 units of phosphorous (P) (including slurry);
- plan for good quality silage (72 DMD+) for younger stock and freshly calved cows;
- plan to take the first cut by the end of May at the latest – delaying will reduce annual yield and result in poor quality;
- a few too many cows in summer can cause large deficits in winter – selling five cows in April could put an extra 100 tonnes of silage in the pit next winter;
- use milk recording results to make decisions on marginal cows;
- ensure you build in a month's reserve feed;
- consider oversowing clover in some suitable paddocks to reduce N inputs later in the year; and,
- prepare a cash flow budget to help plan for much-increased input costs.

A successful second grazing rotation

Managing the second grazing rotation during April is crucial as cows on many spring-calving herds approach their peak, both in terms of grass intake and milk production. You should begin your second rotation when you have three to four paddocks in the region of 1,100-1,200kg DM/ha and a “steps of the stairs” supply of grass in the following paddocks. Average farm cover (AFC) should not dip below 550kg DM/ha, as this will have an impact on the amount of grass grown on your farm during April and a 25-day rotation length is advisable. Grass cover should be in the region of 150-180kg DM per cow during April. Keeping to these targets will allow you to set aside the maximum area possible for a large first cut of silage. A weekly grass measure using

PastureBase Ireland is crucial to keeping an eye on these targets.

If you have one or two paddocks coming towards 1,100-1,200kg DM/ha for grazing and then a gap back to 7-800kg DM/ha on your next paddocks, alternate first rotation grass (during the day) with second rotation grass (at night) to buy some time.

Farmers should use 75kg/ha of N, including slurry with low-emission slurry spreading (LESS) technologies, up to April 1. The advice during April on farms with a low percentage of clover is to apply approximately 30kg per ha to bring farms up to target. Applying P and K in April (such as 18.6.12) will help to promote spring grass growth and aid in recovery of swards following the first rotation.

Beefing up your 2023 calf crop

Many farms have settled at optimum cow numbers post expansion and are now refining their breeding plans to improve margins from a given herd size.

With the increased availability of sexed semen, a greater opportunity now exists to breed ‘the best to the best’ to produce the cows of the future. This will also allow for more cows to be bred to beef AI, which will increase the value and saleability of the calf crop in 2023. The question then is, what criteria should I use when selecting what cows for breeding to beef? Some key factors are:

1. Poor yield of milk solids (milk recording report).
2. Poor fat and protein percentages (milk recording report).
3. Low Economic Breeding Index (EBI) (EBI report).

4. Poor functional traits (bad feet and legs, poor udder – farmer observations).
5. Temperament (farmer observations).
6. Late calving in the current year.

Cows described in points four to six are usually easily identified. In many cases, some of these cows should be considered for culling instead of a beef straw. To maximise genetic gain however, criteria one to three should also be used. This requires good milk recording and breeding data on farm. Your herd EBI profile will identify the lowest index cows, which will be most suitable for breeding to beef AI bulls. Also, the lifetime milk recording profile ranks cows in the herd based on daily margin over feed costs. Use this in tandem with the EBI report to select cows for breeding to beef or dairy bulls.

CellCheck tip of the month

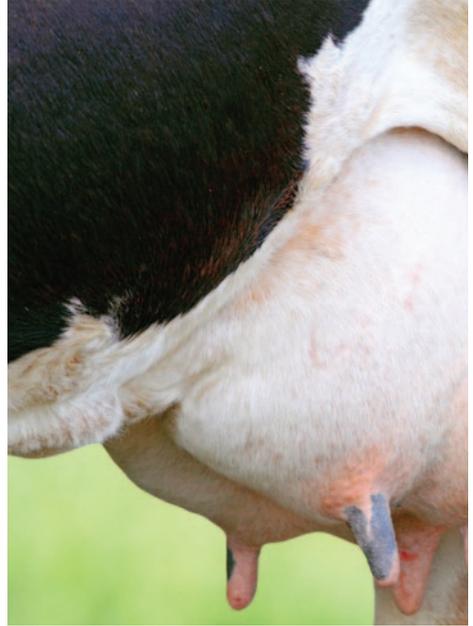


To get the best value from milk recording, the first milk recording

should be done within two months of calving, so it's important to get started if you haven't already done so. Milk recording your cows at least six times per lactation allows you to easily identify both problem cows and top performers in the herd. It is also the most reliable way of collecting the individual cow information required if a prescription for dry cow antibiotics is needed.

Following each recording, a CellCheck summary report is provided along with individual cow information. The CellCheck summary report is divided into four main sections showing performance against key targets for mastitis control:

- current and recent somatic cell count (SCC) for your herd and percentage of your herd with an SCC over 200,000 cells/ml (target is to have less than 15% of herd over 200,000 cells/ml) – if a high proportion of your herd is over 200,000 cells/ml, this indicates a mastitis problem in your herd;
- the next section shows the spread of infection during lactation – by comparing consecutive SCC levels in each cow, recently infected cows can be identified and also the proportion of the herd that is chronically infected – the target here is to have less than 7% of your herd recently infected and less than 8% persistently infected;
- the report also shows the herd SCC distribution in different brackets – a high proportion (target of 85%) with an SCC



Milk record your cows six times per lactation.

below 200,000 cells/ml means good mastitis control – if you upload your clinical mastitis records to the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) (or via some farm software packages) by texting “Mast” and the cow’s freeze brand to 089-457 7663, it helps identify when the infection originated (the dry period or during lactation); and,

- finally, the report shows results for cows recorded within 60 days of calving. This indicates how well mastitis is being controlled during the dry period and at calving. The report shows how effective the dry period was by looking at cure rates during the dry period and at calving.



Clover Farm Walks

The Teagasc Grass10 team, along with Grassland Researchers from Teagasc, will run a series of farm walks during April. Topics to be discussed at the farm walks include white clover, nitrogen fertiliser, grazing management and feed security in 2022.



Date	Location	Time
5 April	Kevin Moran, Caherlistrane, Co. Galway, H91 PP29	11am
5 April	William Denneghy, Currow, Co. Kerry V93 D2F1	11am
6 April	Laurence Sexton, LYG Dairy, Kilbrittain, Co. Cork P72 FC99	11am
6 April	Bryan Daniels, Kilmoganny, Co. Kilkenny R95 P202	11am
7 April	Jim Whyte, Fethard, Co. Tipperary E91 WC53	11am
7 April	Ger Pardy, Birr, Co. Offaly R42 FD88	11am
12 April	Michael Doran, Duncormick, Co. Wexford Y35 X735	11am
12 April	Patrick O'Neill, Mostrim, Co. Longford N39 FC64	11am
13 April	James Barber, Rathdowney, Co. Laois R32 E8H2	11am
13 April	Oisín Gill, Hollymount, Co. Mayo F12 XH64	11am
14 April	Michael Gowen, Kilworth, Co. Cork P61 T998	11am
19 April	Trevor Boland, Skreen, Co. Sligo F91 X535	7pm

Book your ticket for these events at
www.teagasc.ie/cloverwalks or scan the QR code
Registration is advised but not essential

