

Steven Fitzgerald

Steven farms at Aglish, west Waterford. His calving season is very compact with 154 cows calved in a six-week period in 2022 and the remaining 14 cows in the next 18 days. Not surprisingly, he's highly organised when it comes to the calving season.

Like Kevin, his priority now is to get everything prepared for the coming calving season. In addition, his other top tips are:

- "I believe in the importance of having the cows in tip top shape at calving. A healthy cow has a healthy calf and all the straw in the world won't compensate for a weak calf.

- "We'll have a weekend away in mid-January – it gets us ready to 'roll' before calving starts."



Donal Kavanagh

Donal and Fiona Kavanagh farm in Kildare, close to the Wicklow town of Baltinglass. They are liquid milk producers and just over three quarters of the 240-strong dairy herd calves in the spring. He prepares shed space, orders tags, disinfects and vaccinates like Kevin and Steven well in advance of the calving season.

According to Donal, "I put leg bands on the cows as they're dried off. The colour of the leg band is linked to the expected calving date so I know at a glance which cows are close to calving.

"It takes a lot of the work out of sorting the cows around calving time. We'll record the colours of the leg bands on a whiteboard so that everyone knows what the colours mean."



Coccidiosis in dairy calves – your help needed to influence our advice

With the start of the busy spring calving season close at hand, it's time to focus on coccidiosis, a disease which continues to be a concern on many calf-rearing farms.

Coccidiosis mainly causes clinical disease in calves from three weeks to nine months of age.

The most recent all-Island Animal Disease Surveillance Report details the percentage of samples submitted to Regional Veterinary Laboratories returning positive results for coccidial oocysts.

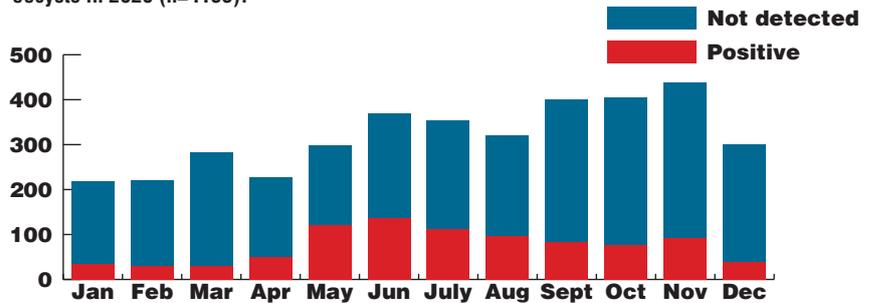
Coccidia are excreted in the dung and are ingested by a susceptible calf in dung-contaminated bedding, feed or water. A single ingested coccidia oocyst develops into thousands of new parasites, each of which destroys the calf's gut lining resulting in very rapid and severe damage to the gut and which can lead to diarrhoea, dysentery (bloody diarrhoea), dehydration, tenesmus (straining), loss of condition and possible death.

The summary of their results, presented in Figure 1, shows a rise in the proportion of samples testing positive for coccidial oocysts throughout the spring, reaching a peak in May. This reflects the infection pressure of increasing numbers of calves in spring-calving herds, especially while the calves are housed.

Infective coccidia oocysts are highly resistant to environmental conditions, both in housing and on pasture, so premises and fields can remain contaminated for a year or more. Calves are commonly infected

Figure 1

Number of bovine faecal samples (all ages) tested for coccidiosis oocysts in 2020 (n=4133).



through ingestion of coccidia oocysts from bedding or pasture, which previously have carried infected cattle (possibly including adult cows). Stressors, such as weaning, turnout, change of diet and poor weather may precipitate outbreaks of disease.

As warm, damp conditions are necessary to allow oocysts to become capable of infecting animals, it is important to avoid dampness in bedding or around water bowls/drinking or

feeding troughs.

A lot of the damage and clinical signs can be seen in calves before coccidia oocysts appear in the faeces. So sampling of a number of calves in the affected group including contemporaries which have not yet developed clinical disease is important.

This might help in the detection of coccidia oocysts and in the diagnosis of the cause of the clinical signs seen.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Regional Veterinary Laboratories, Teagasc and UCD are carrying out research on coccidiosis in dairy calves. The research will find out what dairy farmers are currently doing to control, prevent and treat coccidiosis. You can participate in the study by scanning the QR code and completing the survey on your mobile phone. This survey will take approximately three minutes to complete and it is entirely anonymous. The results of this research will influence future Teagasc advice on how to control coccidiosis on dairy farms.

