

## Top tips June 2023

Edited by

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1. Assess progress of the breeding season by examining submission rate. The target is 90% of all eligible cows served in the first three weeks and 100% served by six weeks. (An eligible cow is any cow that you intend to breed this season, including late calvers.) Identify and check any cows not yet submitted immediately.
2. Use high Dairy Beef Index (DBI) AI bulls once enough dairy straws have been used. These beef bulls should have good calving and carcass traits in combination. Match bulls to cows in the herd. Shorter gestation traits are important for the final weeks of the breeding season.
3. Where clover has been added to swards, keep grazing at lower covers (<1,300kg pre grazing) and skip out of rotation if needed to make sure this happens. Adjust nitrogen (N)-based fertiliser on sward clover content.
4. Silage stocks are low on many farms this year. Complete a winter feed budget once the first cut has been completed. Plan ahead for extra second cut area if there is a potential shortfall in winter feed. Seek advice if needed.
5. Complete a milk recording and use the results to deal with problem high somatic cell count (SCC) cows. The target is SCC under 100,000cells/ml for the summer months.
6. Moorepark Open Day July 4 – save the date.

## Optimum grazing stocking rate in mid-season

Best practice grazing management over the summer months is to maintain pre-grazing herbage mass between 1,300 and 1,500kg dry matter (DM)/ha (8 and 10cm), and target a post-grazing sward height of 4-4.5cm. Grazing conditions have been difficult this spring; therefore, grass quality on a lot of farms needs correction. In order to correct/maintain grass quality through June, July, and August, there must be some scope in the grazing system to allow for surplus paddocks to be taken as bales to ensure quality regrowth. Many farmers say they “dread the sight of bales”, and tighten cows onto higher stocking rates to avoid these surpluses; however, this often leads to cows being forced into heavy covers and being short of grass intake over the summer.

It is better to have some flexibility in the system. This flexibility will be determined by the herd demand throughout this period, which is dictated on a lot of farms by the decision on how much land is closed up for second-cut silage on the grazing platform. **Table 1** shows the daily grass demand per hectare at different stocking rates. The target grass allowance in this example is to maximise herd performance from grazed grass, and would typically mean a daily grass allowance of 18kg DM per cow. When you look at typical

average growth rates across this period they range from 50-65kg DM/ha/day. Setting herd demand above this will increase pre-grazing yields, reduce grass quality, reduce animal performance, and increase concentrate fed, thus, increasing the overall cost structure. As a rule of thumb, farms that grow 12t DM/ha annually should stock the farm at 3LU/ha during this period, while farms that grow 14t DM/ha annually should stock the farm at 3.5LU/ha. This will allow approximately 20% of the grazing area to be taken as surplus during this 10-week period (June 1-August 15).

Farms that have experienced reduced growth rates due to drought conditions over the last number of seasons should set demand based on average growth rates over a five-year period, make provisions for adequate silage stocks from other land sources rather than overstocking the grazing area, and target to have second-cut silage crops made by July 15. As far as the “dreaded bales” are concerned, running these stocking rates will usually result in about two surplus bales per hectare from the grazing block, or 100 bales for an average size herd. That’s not a major issue considering the potential benefits to grass quality and cow performance.

**Table 1: Daily herd demand at different stocking rates.**

Stocking rate second-cut (LU/ha)	3	3.5	4	4.5
Grass allowance (kg DM/ LU/day)	18	18	18	18
Demand (kg DM/ha/day)	54	63	72	81

## Foot bath design and use

There are higher incidences of lameness after the spring due to the bad weather, with roadways and paddock access in unsatisfactory conditions. Some people use foot baths to help with lameness issues. When using foot baths, it is important that they are correctly designed and used for optimum efficiency.

Foot baths should be no longer than 3m, as a bath longer than this can be contaminated by the cows as they walk through. Pre-wash baths are no longer recommended for the same reason, as the cows tend to soil the bath's solution as they walk through. Too short a bath is not suitable as the cows may not drop all their feet in the solution or some feet may only drop in the solution once. On many farms, foot baths are in use, but do not get optimum results. The main reasons for this can be that the bath is poorly designed or the solution used is not appropriate. The rule of thumb is to have 1L of solution for each cow that passes. So a 200L-foot bath will allow 200 cows through it before it has to be refreshed. Additional passes of the cows above this may actually help spread infectious disease, as the solution is no longer effective and the foot bath



may be soiled from the previous cows that passed through. For most farmers, this would mean refreshing the solution between each milking. Although some farms with larger herds may have to wash out and refresh the solution during milking. Each foot bath requires 1L of solution per cow. The depth of the solution in the bath should be between 10 and 15cm.

To calculate the size of your foot bath, you multiply length x width x depth in centimetres and divide by 1,000 to convert to litres. The floor of the foot bath should be level with the exit ramp to improve cow flow through the foot bath.

Some farmers are now using automatic foot baths. These are programmable for different chemical rates and can count the number of cows that pass through them. They can automatically empty, wash out, and refill with solution when the pre-set number of cows pass through. They normally have two options for different chemicals that can be added and are safer for the operator if dangerous chemicals such as formalin are being used on the farm. To install an automatic foot bath, the farmer will be required to have a power supply, air supply, and water from a wash down hose close to where the foot bath will be installed.

## HEALTH & SAFETY



### Organise to stay safe



*Safety at silage making.*

So far in 2023, three farm workplace fatalities have been reported to the Health and Safety Authority (provisional data at May 15). A Teagasc National Farm Survey study has shown that over 4,500 farm workplace injuries occur annually, with 80% requiring medical treatment. During June, farm work gets busy, especially with tractor and machinery and livestock-related work. Organising work is crucial to prevent injuries. This involves keeping safety to the fore by having all guards in place and using safe work practices.

Contractors play a huge role in farm work, and it is vital that farmers and contractors communicate closely about schedules and safety, especially when there is a backlog of work due to adverse weather. In this newsletter pack we include a health and safety newsletter on safety with bulls. These animals present a constant hazard on farms and vigilance is necessary, especially as the breeding season progresses. As June progresses, school holidays arrive, so make preparations for childhood safety over the summer months.