

# DAIRY

November 2020

## Make spring grass your priority

Almost two-thirds of the grass available in early spring is grass that will grow during October and early November. Therefore, it is essential that the fields/paddocks closed during October are not grazed in November. Some farmers will be tempted to go back and graze closed fields. Eating into grass supply now will not only increase the cost of milk production next spring, but also reduce the total amount of feed made available on the farm.

Carrying a low level of grass on the farm entering winter generally reduces the amount of grass grown in spring! Remember that every day the cow is at grass next spring is worth almost €3/cow/day. The demand for spring grass is increasing all the time due to increased calving rates, increased cow numbers and increased stocking rates. Therefore, having as much grass available as possible for cows to graze in spring is important. The closing grass supply on the farm in autumn has the greatest influence on spring grass supply.



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*Do not graze paddocks you closed in October until next spring.*

For those who measure grass, the target closing cover in mid November is 550-600kg DM/ha. This should result in a farm cover of 650-750kg DM/ha on December 1 (Grass10 target).

## Taking a selective approach to drying cows off

Legislation restricting antibiotic use at dry-off will be introduced in January 2022. Antibiotic resistance in human medicine is prompting this change. Teagasc and Animal Health Ireland (AHI) ran 35 drying off webinars in recent weeks, with a focus on the use of selective dry cow therapy (SDCT).

In the webinars, we suggested that in herds with a somatic cell count (SCC) of less than 200,000 cells/ml throughout the year, cows with an average annual SCC of less than 100,000 cells/ml and no clinical cases of mastitis, could make suitable candidates for drying off without dry cow antibiotics.

We'd urge caution for first-time users of SDCT. Be even more cautious than the target figures detailed in the panel above.

A surgical hygiene standard is needed. The last cow needs the same level of care and attention at drying off as the first. Use the milk recording SCC application under the profiles tab on the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation's (ICBF) HerdPlus. It's a great tool. It allows you to identify low-SCC cows and problem cows easily.

Take milk samples from some of your high-SCC cows to identify the bacteria causing their infection and the antibiotics that they are vulnerable to. Around one cow in every 10 should be sampled. A free drying-off consultation is available through the Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH) programme for suitable farms. A list of laboratories, the consultation application form and videos from the drying off webinars are available on the AHI website. You can also talk with your Teagasc dairy advisor for guidance on the use of SDCT in your herd.



### The Dairy Edge Podcast

The Dairy Edge is Teagasc's weekly podcast covering news, information, tips and advice for dairy farmers.

Presented by Emma Louise Coffey, The Dairy Edge provides insights and opinion to improve your dairy farm performance.

### How do I listen?

The Dairy Edge is available on:

 iPhone  Android  Spotify

Open the camera on your phone & scan the QR code for more information



## SPECIAL FEATURE



## Setting up the farm for spring: people

Over the next three editions of the dairy newsletter, we will focus on setting up your dairy farm for spring 2021, under the headings: (1) people; (2) facilities and practices; and, (3) supplies. The series has been prepared by Marion Beecher and Martina Gormley.

Every farm involves people. Regardless of farm size, it takes a combination of people to get the work done – owner, family, part-time or full-time staff, contractors and relief workers.

From mid January to the end of June 2019, 72 farmers recorded their hours worked. For those farms, the average herd size was 137 cows and 17% of the work was completed by hired workers, with another 18% completed by family members (**Figure 1**). As we move into a somewhat quieter period of work on farms, now is a good time to start thinking about the spring and who is going to do the work on your farm.

### Tips to kick start the employment process

#### 1. Who do you need?

Planning will help ensure everyone has a manageable workload and time off. There is a chance that you or someone working on the farm may need to self-isolate during calving, so you may need more people. Involve family members in this discussion.

#### 2. Where to find people?

A good starting point is to talk with family members about their availability. In a survey of 315 Irish dairy farmers, word of mouth through friends and associates was the most commonly used recruitment method. The more people who hear about your job, the greater the pool of applicants and the more likely you are to find the right person. Keep in mind that there will be more people available to work on farms due to Covid-19 restrictions.

#### 3. How to advertise?

An attractive job description that is detailed and shows how well organised and professional you are will help attract the best possible people to you.

For templates go to: [www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Teagasc-Farm-Labour-Combined-Book.pdf](http://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Teagasc-Farm-Labour-Combined-Book.pdf).

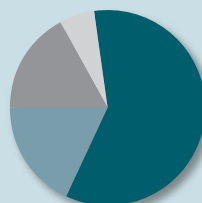
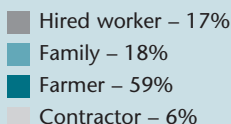
#### 4. Getting it right from the start

There are legal requirements (written terms and conditions, a payslip issued after each payment, employee working hours recorded, correct annual leave given, and employees paid at least the minimum wage for every hour worked) that must be adhered to. More detail can be found at [www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/is-there-an-opportunity-now-to-hire-good-staff-.php](http://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/is-there-an-opportunity-now-to-hire-good-staff-.php).

#### 5. When to start?

Once you find the right person, it will take them time to get used to working on your farm regardless of their skills or experience. It is important that whoever you hire starts well before calving begins to ensure they have time to learn how your farm works. If you look after people, they'll look after the animals and everything else will follow.

**Figure 1: Who does the work on the farm?**



## Preparing for a successful dry cow period



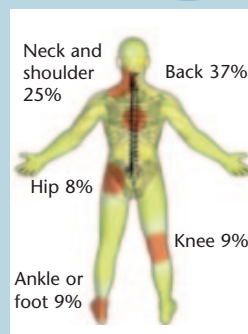
- Review expected calving dates to plan your dry-off dates, taking into consideration the shorter gestation length of some sires. Cows need a dry period of eight weeks to allow for udder repair and to rejuvenate, which is especially important for thin or young cows.
- Dry off abruptly and avoid skipping milkings leading up to dry-off. Where cows are yielding greater than 12L/day in the week before dry-off, reduce feed availability, but not water access, to reduce milk production by the dry-off date.
- Have the necessary equipment ready, including a clean apron, disposable gloves, teat wipes/cotton wool, methylated spirits, marker, head torch and intramammary tubes.
- It is important not to dry off cows when you are tired, hungry, or stressed. Only dry off 20 cows at a time and have additional help available to assist. Have a system in place for cleaning, sterilising teats and tubing, and repeat for each cow.
- Ensure teats are disinfected post tubing and clean the parlour between batches to maintain a clean environment.
- To avoid any errors, good identification of cows and accurate record keeping are essential.
- Following dry-off, keep the cows standing for a minimum of 30 minutes in a clean yard before putting them in a dry field or clean cubicles.
- Clean and lime cubicles twice daily for the entire duration of the dry period and use this as an opportunity to monitor the cows, as they are susceptible to infection, particularly for two weeks after drying off and two weeks before calving.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Prevent musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are injuries of muscles, ligaments, tendons, cartilage, discs and bones. A study among Irish farmers found that 54% reported an MSD, making them the most prevalent occupational health problem. All MSDs, including so-called 'slipped discs', are painful and need rehabilitation. Preventing MSDs requires your input as follows: (1) use equipment and design facilities that eliminate or reduce the need for lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling; (2) always assess a load before lifting; and, (3) keep a tidy and

well-lit farmyard to prevent trips and falls. The EU Occupational Safety and Health Agency (EUOSHA) campaign Lighten the Load 2020-22 has commenced. Further information at: <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/en>.



MSD injuries of Irish farmers.