

DAIRY

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Moorepark '21 – key messages for dairy farmers

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Teagasc recently hosted over 7,000 dairy farmers, students and industry professionals across a three-day event at Moorepark Research Centre. The theme of the event was 'Delivering Sustainability'. Some of the key take-home messages for dairy farmers were as follows:

- Ireland's dairy farmers produce milk with a low carbon footprint relative to other major dairy producers. Farmers should implement new practices to improve carbon efficiency, water quality and biodiversity.
- Technical improvements in the Economic Breeding Index (EBI) and grass management have contributed significantly to increased dairy farm profit over the last decade. Further progress is very achievable.
- Approximately 50-60% of the difference in profit between farms is due to how much grass is utilised per hectare. It is the single most important factor driving farm margin per ha.
- Nitrogen (N) use efficiency can be improved from its current 24% to over 35% on dairy farms by implementing a range of good practices around fertiliser, concentrate and slurry use.
- Fertiliser N can be reduced by 50-100kg per ha on swards with 20-25% white clover for no reduction in annual dry matter yield.
- Targeted slurry use in spring and implementing low-emission slurry spreading (LESS) systems can significantly reduce chemical fertiliser costs and improve N use efficiency on farms.
- The Dairy Beef Index combines calving difficulty with calf beef traits and should be used when selecting beef sires for the dairy herd. Pay attention to the balance of these traits in AI beef sires used.
- Sexed semen will play an important role in improving the quality of beef calves from the dairy herd and also will increase rate of genetic gain on the EBI by up to 15%.

The full proceedings of the open day are available at: www.teagasc.ie/Moorepark21.

Dry cow treatments

The regulations on antibiotic use will change on January 28, 2022. Dairy farmers will require evidence to use antibiotics at the end of lactation. You need cow-level data to make the correct decisions. Regular milk recording will provide farmers with the evidence needed to show if antibiotics are required. To build up an accurate picture of somatic cell count (SCC) in your herd before drying off, two recordings taken 30 days apart are needed. An example timeline of the last milk recordings before drying off and the first milk recording after calving is shown in **Figure 1**. Two recording sessions are required in late autumn because we recommend an interval of no more than 30 days between

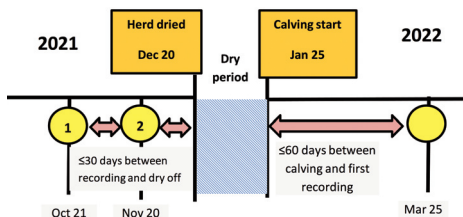


FIGURE 1: Suggested milk recording schedule for a dairy herd at start and end of lactation.

milk recording and drying off. Why? Typically spring calving cows are dried off in batches over six to eight weeks. Leaving an interval of greater than 30 days between the last milk recording and dry off leaves cows exposed to the risk of acquiring a new infection that is undetected prior to drying off. This will become an increasingly important risk to control.

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:

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

BCS in autumn-calving cows

The dry cow period should set up the cow for a trouble-free calving and a smooth transition to a productive lactation. The main points to get right are body condition score (BCS) and mineral nutrition. The target is to have cows at 3.0 to 3.25 at calving, which means good cover on the short ribs but no fat at the tail-head. Autumn-calving cows are generally in good condition at calving down. However, over-conditioning causes problems with milk fever and ketosis, and should be avoided. This can happen where good-quality grass was available to cows through the dry period. Monitor later-calving cows closely and limit intake to 8.0UFL of energy (10-11kg DM) until about two weeks

before calving. From two weeks before calving, offer additional fibre feed to maintain gut fill. Minerals in the cow's diet can come from three sources: feed/forage; mineral supplements; and, in some cases the water source can contribute. It is important to limit the potassium (K) content of the forage to 2% or less to avoid milk fever. Feeding extra magnesium (Mg) up to 25g per head per day is very beneficial to calving and milk fever prevention. Speak to your advisor about the different Mg options and feeding rates. Phosphorus (P) is also important. Trace minerals like copper, selenium and iodine are needed in tiny quantities, but are vital for good cow health and should be offered to dry cows. The same goes for vitamins, especially vitamin D in the case of dry cows.

Climate Actions for October



Check out your Bord Bia farmer feedback report for your carbon footprint figure

Allow topped hedges grow to at least 1.5m above the bank and allow a thorn sapling in each hedge grow to a thorn tree

Check your soil maps from the nutrient management plan and apply K to low index soils

Apply lime to low pH grassland and crop soils

Start closing paddocks from the 10th October onwards (1-2 weeks earlier in wet areas)

Start taking soil samples for your farm. Don't delay until after Christmas

Monitoring badgers

PHILIP BRESLIN and ROSANNE GREENE of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) report on monitoring badger activity on farms as a TB control measure.



Badger setts are mostly found in hedgerows, ringforts and riverbanks. Good farming land has the capacity to host badgers. Large spoil heaps at the entrance are a tell-tale sign that it is a badger sett. They are capable of moving quite large stones. Badger setts have openings 25cm wide, whereas while a rabbit burrow may have a wide opening, the chamber itself quickly narrows. The presence of hay-like bedding beside the entrance is a definite sign that it is a badger sett.

Badgers root in pasture searching for food,

they often overturn cow pats. They also form small pits about 12cm in diameter called snuffle holes. Badgers create well-worn paths about 15-20cm in width. These are easiest to see in the winter and early spring.

In wet areas around gates or drinking troughs you may see badger footprints. The prints consist of a broad kidney shaped pad with four or sometimes five toes visible in a straight line. A latrine pith is where a badger digs a small hole and defecates into it and leaves it uncovered. Latrines are generally found close to a sett. Badgers have a territory that can range about 500m to 1km from the main sett. If you see signs of badger activity on your farm, let the wildlife officer in your Regional Veterinary Office know.



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This business course, now in its seventh year, is beginning in November/December 2021. There has already been great interest but a small number of places are still available.