

Messages:

- ▶ “Yield is vanity – profit is sanity”... let this mantra guide your decisions
- ▶ Know the cost of problems so that you prevent them
- ▶ Minerals NOW are essential
- ▶ January is high risk time for mastitis
- ▶ Make your “cheques” and act
- ▶ Make your N P K slurry and lime plan now
- ▶ Be ready for calving and calf rearing
- ▶ While you have time review replacement heifer care

By Matt Ryan

**YIELD IS VANITY; PROFIT IS SANITY**

- ▶ After cows milking so well in 2018 I am now being asked ‘have we got it wrong on meal feeding cows?’
- ▶ The heading says it all. Before you are driven to answering the question by feeding the same amount of meals to your cows in 2019, please, check your profits.
- ▶ Milk price is going to be in or around 30cents/litre in 2019. There is only two ways to have a decent profit at that price:
  1. High gross output per litre/cow/hectare.
  2. Low costs per litre/cow/hectare.
- ▶ Generally, gross output per litre will be 1-2c/l below the milk price achieved.
- ▶ If your costs per litre are 20, 25 or 30 cents you will have 10, 5 or zero cents profit per litre. Simple!
  - Therefore, costs are the main influencer of profit.
  - How can feeding 7-10c/l of meal be profitable?
- ▶ Profits are between €150 and €700 per cow. What are yours? If you don’t know, don’t kid yourself by talking about how great cows milked in 2019.
  - Get your Profit Monitor done immediately,
  - Benchmark your performance for 2018 against profitable Group members and plan for 2019.

**KNOW THE COST & ACT TO PREVENT**

- ▶ Farm incomes are constantly under pressure, so we cannot afford to be missing out on any potential gains.
- ▶ A lot of animal health issues arise in the springtime. We must prevent calf deaths, cow metabolic problems, cow injury, cow health problems and cow deaths’ by good management.
- ▶ UCD have estimated the cost of the following problems (approximate costs):

Cow Death:	€2282 per death
Milk fever:	€130 per case
Left Displaced abomasum	€515 per case
Grass tetany (clinical)	€632 per case
Ketosis	€190 per case
Acidosis	€277 per case
Lameness	€312 per case
Mastitis	€450 per case
Vulva Discharge	€188 per case
Cost of a twin calving:	€122 per calving
Cost of calf death:	€470 per case
Cost of retained placenta:	€392 per case.

- ▶ From the above figures each farmer should estimate the loss associated with his lack of preventative action. In a 100-cow herd, if you encountered one of each of the problems (not unreasonable) this spring the loss would be €6,000.
- ▶ In an era of increasing costs, lower sales prices we cannot allow disease, health mismanagement to reduce our profit due to inadequate preventative care.
- ▶ The above costs are direct and indirect costs.
- ▶ The direct costs covered: vet’s time, herdsman’s time, drugs, discarded milk, reduced yields and others (such as dead calves).
- ▶ Indirect costs covered: increased risk of disease, extended calving interval, higher culling rates, extra services per conception and risk of fatality.

**MINERALS ARE ESSENTIAL**

- ▶ Mineral deficiency is responsible for retained placenta, calf deaths at birth, calving difficulty and many more



“Farm incomes are constantly under pressure, so we cannot afford to be missing out on any potential gains”

related problems.

- ▶ To be sure of the concentration of the various minerals in the mix, get your silage analysed for minerals and act accordingly. Some of the samples I have seen this year are very low in Manganese, Cobalt and Copper with very high levels of antagonists, such as Aluminium and Molybdenum.
- ▶ A reputable pre-calving mineral must be fed to cows from 40 days before calving.
- ▶ Feed 2-3 oz /cow/day. Shake half of this quantity evenly on the silage morning and evening.
- ▶ In calf heifers must also receive pre-calver mineral.
- ▶ If your farm has a special mineral problem, then include extra quantities of that mineral.
- ▶ Ketosis, acidosis and to a lesser extent lameness are feed problems associated with poor silage (under feeding energy levels) or switching from good silage to poor silage (bought in feed may not be as good as your own).

### MASTITIS: A CRUCIAL TIME

- ▶ Because the cows' immune system comes under severe pressure in the last few weeks before calving, mastitis is a very likely outcome either before calving or in the first 2 weeks after calving.
- ▶ Causes severe losses and frustration and most of the early lactation problems are caused by poor hygiene

in the cubicles and the calving boxes before and after calving.

- ▶ It is prevented by having:
  - Clean environment
  - Good milking machine.
  - Good milking routine.
  - Good cow immunity.
  - Maintaining a stress-free environment for cows and particularly heifers.
- ▶ This is the month where the cow's immunity decreases and she becomes stressed:
  - The last months of pregnancy and the influence of the dry cow wears off.
  - Scrape yards and cubicles at least twice per day.
  - Avoid overcrowding (1 cubicle/cow is required)
  - Move shy feeders and cows that lie in passages onto a straw bedded area with plenty of feeding face.
  - Heifers calving down or getting mastitis in first 4-7 days, indicates that they have been exposed to dirty bedding in the last few weeks of pregnancy. This is a terrible loss.
- ▶ Where there is a history of heifers getting mastitis before or after calving, a case can be made to teat seal them 4-6 weeks before calving. Take advice on same.
- ▶ It is well known that very poor milking machines are the cause of 40 per cent of all mastitis problems.

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- Get it serviced now by a qualified technician. Make sure to get a print-out and act on the recommendations. If your technician isn't up to scratch get a new technician.
- Liners, worn rubber, diaphragms must be replaced.
- Vacuum pump should be washed out with diesel.
- Regulator should be cleaned with methylated spirits.
- Pulsators and relays must be checked.
- Draw hot water through the pulse tube, through the pulsators/relays and into the vacuum line to clean them out.
- As an alternative to a dump line use an old churn or milk bucket in the pit. This is being done but you have to lift this churn out of the pit (backache).
- It is suggested you leave the churn in the dairy and use a long milk tube to attach onto the relevant unit.
- Consider the addition of a dump line, an automatic bulk tank and milking machine washer, if these chores are slowing you down in the parlour.
- If you are milking more than 8 cows per unit consider adding a few more units to your machine.
- These suggestions should be seriously considered if you are paying a lot of tax or if you are expanding.
- Some well-informed farmers could and do service their milking machines themselves.
- ▶ Poor milking routine is the cause of mastitis on 30 per cent of farms.
  - Something that must be re-learned and practiced.
  - Make sure to teach all those skills to new farm staff in January.

**CHEQUES AND ACTIONS**

- ▶ This is a key month to check out the progress of your winter management and the reward will be better "cheques" in 2019.
- ▶ Have your thin cows put on condition?
  - They should now be near body condition score (BCS) of 3.
  - If they aren't and they are still 6-8 weeks from calving increase the meal feed and keep them on very good silage.
  - If some cows are too fat (BCS = 3,5+) then you must separate them out from the cows and restrict their silage to 25-30kg silage (fresh) plus 2-3kg straw. Otherwise, they will have health problems after calving, will milk 300 litres less in early lactation and be slower to go in calf.
  - They will be more prone to calving problems and milk fever.
- ▶ Have you lame cows, heifers or cattle on slats? I'm convinced it is a major problem on many farms. It is not picked up in time, mainly through neglect.
  - To prevent, keep yards and passages clean; but you must also have good ventilation.

- Put milkers through a foothbath of Copper or Zinc for three consecutive days during each month.
- ▶ Has your herd lice?
  - They may have returned.
  - They will have been scratching or licking themselves.
- ▶ Are your strong yearlings, replacement or males going to grass over 280kg?
  - They need no more meals with fairly good silage.
  - Light weanlings almost certainly need 2-3kg of meal (12-14 per cent P), particularly if silage quality moderate, otherwise they will not achieve service weights in May.
- ▶ Look out for the signs of liver fluke in stock.
  - It costs €160 per cow affected.
  - The losses can be similar for cattle.
  - Consult your vet.
  - Symptoms include scouring, poor thrive.
  - Best confirmed by dung samples, dose before calving, being aware of milk withdrawal periods.
- ▶ Worms (type11) can be a serious problem for all cattle and young cows.
  - Confirm their presence or absence with a dung sample.
  - Use a worm dose that kills type 11 stomach worms.

**NITROGEN + P + K & SLURRY ADVICE**

- ▶ We do not know how long the winter may be but we need to risk manage the possibility that it will be long. One of the ways is to provide spring grass for all types of stock.
- ▶ Achieve this goal by applying nitrogen and slurry immediately the rules allow.
  - To achieve this you must have N (protected Urea) and the slurry agitated (take care) for the following date:

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Slurry/FYM/Nitrogen</b>
a) 16 week storage zone	12th January
b) 18 week storage zone	15th January
c) 20 week storage zone	31st January
d) 22 week storage zone	31st January

- ▶ Even after these dates be careful as the object of the exercise is not to pollute (even a little), by loss of nutrients, wells, rivers, streams etc.
  - Stay back from these.
  - Don't spread on wet land, or when rain is forecast.
  - However, your target must be ready to apply the nitrogen and the slurry on these dates as near as possible for your region.
- ▶ Best results are got from spreading slurry in spring, so be ready when dry, fine weather arrives. When slurry works well less bagged nitrogen will have to be purchased.
- ▶ Nitrogen ration: The most any farmer will be using this year is 279kgs N/ha (226 units/acre; multiply kgs/ha by 0.8 = units/acre) per acre over the whole farm.
  - Therefore, there is no justification in putting on





- too much at any particular time. You must plan it.
- The recommended level of nitrogen for all farmers (regardless of stocking rate) on the 1st application is 23 units/acre of preferably protected Urea because it is better for the environment and is cost efficient.
- The date of application will vary from 15th January (early grazing farms) to early March (late grazing farms).
- Research says you will grow adequate early grass with 23 units of N/acre and more grass by holding onto nitrogen until March – May.
- The entire farm should get this dressing but none in areas if getting over 13,500 litres per acre of slurry.
- ▶ Soil Test now as we are ‘miles off’ soil fertility levels to grow adequate grass. It will save fertiliser money and generate more grass.
- ▶ There is a lot of talk recently about Phosphorous. Too much of it isn’t wanted, but there is much evidence out there that many farms are now low in it. Low Phosphate will result in reduced grass yield by 10-20 per cent and the loss is greatest in spring and autumn, when you really need grass.
- ▶ Potash is another major mineral required for grass growth. Deficiency reduces yield of grass by 10 per cent.
- ▶ Lime (Calcium) is absolutely essential now that we are expected to grow grass with less Nitrogen
  - In the past Nitrogen could compensate for low lime but we can’t use too much N anymore – anyway it is ludicrously more expensive!
  - There is no need to remind you that where lime is deficient that: (a) ryegrass and clover die out quickly (b) pastures are unpalatable and have low feeding value (c) silage will also have poorer feeding qualities (d) grass yield will be reduced, particularly, at the beginning and end of the year.
  - Lime improves the pH in the soil which releases more nitrogen and phosphate – free bonus from applying lime.
  - Lime is the very first fertiliser investment you must make on a farm.
- ▶ You need to make your fertiliser plan for 2019 based on fact, that is soil sample results. The following simple plan works:
  - Phosphorous and Potash for grazing:
    - ➔ Maintenance: P = 20 units/acre; K= 40 units/

**ICMSA**

**THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION**

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**“Calf rearing is massively demanding. Have you a plan in place to minimise labour requirements while at same time maximising care of the calf? Standard Operating Procedures should be made out for calving and calf rearing and displayed in those sheds. The AHI leaflets will help towards this task.”**

- acre
- Index 1: P = 36units/acre; K = 90 units/acre,
- Index 2: P = 28units/acre; K = 65 units/acre
- Rates required vary with SR/acre and with fixation capacity of soils, especially P. The rates are approximate and may vary with Nitrates rules.
- Maintenance: P & K for silage:
  - 1st Cut: P= 15-20 units/acre; K= 100units/acre
  - 2nd Cut: P = 14 units/acre: K = 60 units/acre.
  - Set out a simple plan with only a few variations for low/high P & K areas.
  - Minimise the number of fertiliser products required,
  - Get P out early; either early spring (75 per cent of annual quantity) or autumn,
  - Avoid excess K in spring (risk of tetany); if extra required apply in autumn or a little throughout the season,
  - 1000 gallons slurry = 1 bag 5:5:30 and should be applied to silage ground.

#### BE READY FOR CALVING & CALF REARING

- ▶ Calf rearing is massively demanding on help and care. Have you a plan in place to minimise labour requirements while at same time maximising care of the calf? SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) should be made out for calving and calf rearing and displayed in those sheds. The AHI leaflets will help towards this task.
- ▶ Calf pneumonia costs €136 per calf, occurring on nearly 50 per cent of all farms and being responsible for 13 per cent mortality in young calves
  - Prevention is the name of the game.
  - Improve the ventilation and reduce the number of calves in one air space and calves passing through each pen.
  - Vaccinate if it is an ongoing problem – some

farmers have got positive results from IBR vaccine up the nose after birth where it is an ongoing problem

- ▶ The earlier you calve the longer calves will be in houses
  - Requires more labour to feed and clean them.
  - The risk of scour and pneumonia increases greatly.
  - So, plan to delay calving next year until early February.
- ▶ Your Plan – show it to the person with calf rearing responsibilities.
  - Calve cows in clean calving boxes; you need one for every 10 cows in the herd with plenty of straw
  - Disinfect calf’s naval
  - Follow the 1:2:3 rule on colostrum. Use a stomach tube (clean) to make it happen
  - Put him in a pen with not more than five calves and feed him milk/milk subs by way of multiple teat feeder with five teats and each calf’s feed divided in the feeder. This prevents the quick drinker getting too much, which is the main reason for scouring. I don’t recommend individual calf pens as they are too laborious and only suitable for small units.
  - Then move the calf, when drinking fast enough to keep up, into a pen with 10 calves on a multiple, compartmentalised feeder.
  - Then move calves out to fields with grass from 3-4 weeks of age onto a 30 to 50-teat multiple feeder. Many farmers are doing this successfully. For this to work well the calf needs a dry sheltered field. Maybe a run back to a haybarn type shed would also work. Straw or good hay in a rack is also required. It is best if the milk flows to the calf rather than having the calf having to work hard by sucking from below his height.
- ▶ To avoid spreading John’s Disease, do not batch feed cow’s milk to replacement heifers, feed milk replacer



instead.

- Cow's milk can be fed to bull calves. This is very important as John's disease is costing farmers over €5500 per 100-herd.
  - On the subject of John's, you should now join phase two of the National John's Control programme – contact your Co-Op or AHI.
- ▶ Therefore, put this system in place during January as you won't have time in February.

### REPLACEMENT HEIFER CARE

- ▶ The really important tasks that dairy farmer must address in January is BCS
- Cows must not calve down either too fat (a big risk 2019) or too thin (very common)
  - Metabolic problems must be minimised as outlined above
  - Calving problems must be minimum by correct

feeding in the last month of pregnancy

- ▶ Replacement heifer management:
- Ensure weanlings are going to hit weight targets for May service,
  - It would be a good idea to mix in calving heifers with thin cows or 2nd calvers now, so as to minimise post-calving stress,
  - "Run" the in-calf heifers through the milking parlour from now to calving, feeding them 1-2 kgs/hd/day meal to get them used to the parlour. They will also be less likely to be bullied during milking as they will think they "own" the parlour.
  - They must get pre-calving mineral for same period as cows.
  - More than the cows, they must be kept on very clean bed pre-calving because their intake can be as low as 4-6 KgsDM and their immune system will be very low.

▶ Have you or your Discussion Group discussed and chosen your 2019 AI bulls? If not, you must do so soon, being driven by your present herd genetics.

▶ Examine your milk recording and ICBF data to identify your best cows:

- These are high EBI, high fertility (€80+), producing high percentage fat and particularly protein.

- You breed from these but more importantly you don't sell them if reducing cow numbers.

- This will be a very important exercise and will require you give it time.

▶ All heifers for mating this year must now be 255kgs minimum. Under that will need special attention. If greater than 280kgs they need to be restricted in feed.

### Finally

Don't forget the Grassland Conference in Charleville Park Hotel, Co Cork on 9th January at 9.30 am.

I sign off, wishing all my readers "A Happy and Prosperous 2019"

*"Understand that failure is not the opposite to success; it is part of it"*

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