

## Messages:

- ▶ “Victimhood is optional”
- ▶ Save on costs wherever you can!
- ▶ Your future is based around controlling cost – get into the habit now.
- ▶ Plan the end of breeding season.
- ▶ Feed grass with Nitrogen (2 applications remain), P & K plus sulphur.
- ▶ Oct/Nov grazed grass is worth €1.70/cow/day more profit. Plan now.
- ▶ Weigh replacement heifer calves and in-calf heifers now and act.
- ▶ Weeds are for tourists, but can cost you €10-25/acre.
- ▶ Seriously consider clover in your perennial swards.

### VICTIMHOOD IS OPTIONAL

- ▶ We all have played the “victim card” many times, trying to make excuses for not doing something/doing a wrong or for making a bad decision. It works on the principle of blaming our circumstances, failures, bad decisions on someone else or circumstances we think we have no control of.
  - Are you a victim of low farm income?
  - Are you a victim of having too little grass?
  - Are you a victim of having bad cows?
  - Are you a victim of being over-worked?
  - Are you a victim of stress related problems?
- ▶ Take control of your circumstances to improve your lot.
- ▶ Dairy farming is heading into unknown territory that will bring many challenges to all. Brexit, environmental regulations, labour issues, price-cost squeeze etc.
- ▶ So as to not allow these issues ‘stress you out’ and make you a victim, you must rely on: your discussion group, adviser, “pigeon carriers” (people in the business with knowledge), your family, doctor etc.
- ▶ Knowledge is power. To that end I will try to keep you informed through this medium, but you must attend all research demos/farm walks to build your knowledge base.
- ▶ Remember the advice I give here is based on research, unbiased.

### THINK FIRST!

- ▶ All farm decisions from now on **MUST** be made on economic grounds:
  - Will I make more money by the investment?
  - Will I have to work less and be able to manage more?
  - Will it help me to save on labour costs?
  - Many, many farmers don’t seem to be able to do economic analysis on investments; they work on “hunches” because it always worked.
- ▶ Working “24/7” is crazy. What for?
  - We always did it, we don’t know any different!
  - We have to because no one else will do it? Why do you think sons/daughters won’t stay working

with you?

- We have large borrowing? You can’t manage borrowings by working harder. You need time to think and manage.

### SAVE ON COSTS

- ▶ With all the challenges that dairying is facing, profits will be challenged and there is only one way to guarantee the future and that is by controlling costs.
- ▶ Because farmers are used to spending they find it hard to cut back on a ‘spending attitude’. Ask yourself: do I need to buy? And if so, why and will it make you financially better off?
- ▶ Save as hard as you can on costs. Milk production costs in Ireland are between 26 to 35 cents/litre (including labour). You don’t need to be a genius to work out what you must do when milk price is 30c/l.
- ▶ Use P & K plus lime as much as you can as the return is 152 per cent on the money spent.
- ▶ Give no meals to any animal, except small calves because the return of the money invested in meals for cows is only 3.2 per cent (a no brainer!),
- ▶ When grass is plentiful, the response to feeding meal to calves is 8:1 (that is 8kg meal required to give 1 kg weight gain); whereas in autumn the response is 4:1.
- ▶ Prevent mastitis (high SCC) by good, simple practices
- ▶ Prevent lameness by:
  - Good hoof care management,
  - No aggressive driving to and from parlour,
  - Good roadways.
- ▶ Get all cows in calf as they are more valuable than culls – so be very pro-active on heat detection. Early July mating gives an early April calver.
- ▶ Scan now to confirm pregnancy – it will also tell you cow that are not in-calf; that have weak pregnancies. With veterinary advice you can take appropriate action.
- ▶ Reduce dosing costs
- ▶ Make adequate silage this year so as not to have to buy expensive feeds next winter. Surplus baled silage should substitute for meals when grazing grass becomes tight.
- ▶ Graze out paddocks well by not wasting grass by ‘topping’ or letting it rot by going stemmy. Save on machinery running costs, particularly diesel, by grass budgeting to reduce topping and once per month nitrogen spreading.
- ▶ 13 times per week milking to reduce labour costs.

### HIGHER MILK SALES

- ▶ Maximise the amount of milk produced at grass because it only costs €1.00 per day to feed a cow at this time of year, compared to nearly twice that in November/December.
- ▶ Your milk price will be high if the % fat and protein is high, which is achieved by not having stemmy grass.
- ▶ You will lose 1-3 cents/litre if you incur SCC, TBC, and antibiotic or water penalties.
- ▶ 16:8 hour milk day, helps to free up time and results in a little higher fat.

**END OF BREEDING SEASON**

- ▶ May calvers have no part to play in profitable dairying?
  - The cut-off date for no May calvers is 20th July
  - Don't stop bulling until late July, even if you think you have enough replacements. But you must have enough acres for them.
  - It is still likely that there will be a demand for late calving milking cows next year, based on the demand in 2019 but one never knows.
  - However, if you are tight on the number of replacements for expansion or replacement for disease issues, you should keep bulling cows with Jersey/Fr until late July.
  - All cows now being bulled should get an AI Jersey bull or very short gestation beef bull, such as AA or Hereford.
  - But remember, cows bulling late in the season indicate a fertility problem.
- ▶ The following service dates acts as a reminder of when calving will take place.

**DATE OF SERVICE**

July 12th  
July 18th  
July 14th  
July 30th

**DATE OF CALVING**

21st April  
27th April  
3rd May  
9th May

- ▶ Advised end of season service dates are as follows:
  - July 18th on dry land.
  - July 30th on "late" land.
- ▶ There is two-to-three weeks left in the bulling season.
  - Make use of that time.
  - A short gestation bull
  - A stock bull with no calving data will only make things worse... so make up your mind whether you are in milk or not.
- ▶ Stay focused on heat detection and you will save a lot of money.
  - Every cull cow will cost €1000-€2500, depending on her age and EBI.
  - Every 5 per cent culling over the Moorepark optimum rate of 18 per cent results in a cost of €50 for every cow in your herd.
- ▶ All farmers should scan all cows now (even though a bit late).
  - You will know cows that are not in-calf.

- It will identify weak pregnancies.
- Remedial action, based on veterinary advice, should be undertaken.
- Use fresh semen from a bull with a calving interval of minus 6-10 days, or a Jersey, because the calves will 'pop' out and the cow will jump up immediately after calving and come bulling quicker.
- ▶ I have serious reservations on recommending stock bulls to 'mop-up' the end of breeding because:
  - Many are infertile (1 in 10) and others become infertile (1 in 3)
  - If using one check if many cows are repeating. Some farmers, during the first week of stock bull use AI the cows also as a double insurance.
  - If malfunctioning, get a new bull or revert back to AI – many farmers are successfully using all AI beef breeds to finish out the season.
  - Remember, a missed heat now will cost you a culled cow.

**FEEDING GRASS IN JULY**

- ▶ There are only two nitrogen dressings of approx 28 units/acre each, left between now and year end. One now in mid-July and last in mid-September.
  - Farmers stocked at approx 2.5 cows/ha have only one dressing of 20-28 units/acre left.
  - If you have more you have got your spreading programme wrong.
  - You should bulk spread each application across all acres on these date.
  - This is the time to review the quantity of N used versus your allowance.
- ▶ Nitrogen is a feed cost like meal but gives a return of 48 per cent on the investment.
  - Use protected Urea as it better for the environment (lower losses etc.)
  - It is 11 per cent cheaper than CAN and 11 per cent more expensive than ordinary Urea but it is more efficient. Where 10mm rain forecast within 24-36 hours use protected urea.
- ▶ If Soil Index for P and K are low:
  - Apply some P & K to improve growth and their content in grass.
  - Apply a high N compound with low P & K; but some farmers may have to apply 18:6:12.

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- If extra K has to be applied, August is the best month.
  - ▶ Apply 5-10 units of Sulphur per acre.
  - ▶ Empty all slurry and soiled water tanks now.
- OCT – NOV GRASS PLAN FROM LATE JULY**
- ▶ October-November seems a long way off but if you don't plan and execute the build-up of grass from now you won't have enough grass in October- November.
  - ▶ Having enough grass then to keep cows out 3-6 hours per day will be worth more than €1.70 per cow per day in extra profit.
    - A very worthwhile reason to make a plan.
  - ▶ Late July is the time to start the autumn build up of grass.
  - ▶ Plan for a "3rd cut-silage graze".
    - It is too expensive to cut but go for it.
    - It should be grazed in September.
    - Set 15-20 per cent of the farm available for this management exercise.
    - Stock cow at 2.9 cows/ha on the grazing area and put the remainder aside for a "3rd-cut-graze". If this SR isn't possible you are overstocked and you will have to feed extra meals to slow down the rotation in Aug-Sept.
  - ▶ I say "go for it" because your approach to planning and managing aftergrass will be more positive.
  - ▶ Having taken the second cut, preferably 25-31st July, the advice is:
    - Apply 60-70 units of N per acre, plus a little P & K in the form of Cut Sward.
    - Or, apply 1,500 - 2,000 gallons of slurry on the day silage is picked up plus 55-60 units of N, 5-7 days later.
  - ▶ Where this mythical 3rd cut is not being planned you would only be spreading 40-50 units of N for aftergrass resulting in lower yield of grass.
    - The extra 30 units of N applied, grows enough grass (270 kgs DM) on every acre which will feed 10-13 cows for an extra day.
    - If you close 15 per cent of your farm for "3rd-cut-graze" this will allow you increase your rotation length by 6-9 days in September-October.
  - ▶ Having set this '3-cut-graze' aside you may run tight in grass for grazing, but there is no need to panic as you have a number of options.
    - Simply go and graze some of the ground that has been closed up for this "3rd-cut-graze", or,
    - Let the rotation length shorten in light of the fact that you have more grazing ground coming in, or,
    - Feed surplus round baled silage previously cut from the paddocks to tide you over, or,
    - Reduce stocking rates on the cow area.

- Meal feeding is the last option but may be the only worthwhile option on some high stocked farms.
- ▶ If you are using grazing ground for this purpose give it the following attention:
  - Top it very tightly in July.
  - Apply 40-50 units per acre and do not graze for 5-6 weeks, which is until early September.
- ▶ All slurry tanks should be emptied on to second cut ground.

#### DO YOUR WINTER FEED SUMS?

- ▶ You must address this question for your farm now so that you can take remedial steps.
- ▶ Each cow needs 11 Kgs DM per day. Weanlings need 4.7 Kgs DM per day and incalf heifer/store animal need 8.5Kgs DM per day. Discount for any meal feeding planned.
- ▶ Best to do the sum on a dry matter basis.
- ▶ Quantity of silage in pit 300 tons (300,000 Kgs).
  - Equals 60,000 Kgs DM ( $300 \times 1000 \times 0.20$ ), if the silage is 20 per cent dry matter.
  - It is worth getting the silage analysed now.
- ▶ Do the calculations to see if you have enough or too little winter feed.
  - As a result, make plans for making up the deficit.
- ▶ Options available:
  - Sell off livestock, buy meal, straw, fodder beet/kale, rent ground for late second cut silage, rent silage pit and housing for €1.80 - €2.10 per cow per day.
  - To see which option is least expensive, cost all options out and use various combinations to make up the deficit.
  - Some farmers sell off cull cows in late July/Aug to allow more autumn grass for the remainder of the herd or to make baled silage.

#### REPLACEMENT HEIFER MANAGEMENT

- ▶ Weigh both calves and in calf heifers now to establish where they are relative to target weights for 1st July?
  - Calves should be 27 per cent of mature weight = 150kgs (for 550 kg herd)
  - In-calf heifers: 67 per cent of mature weight = 370kgs
- ▶ Therefore, give special management treatment; either meals or graze in front of older calves or heifers, to all animals below the target weight.
- ▶ Research has shown that moderate calves on 1st July can make good weanlings on 1st November if grazing management is top drawer.
  - It is all about feeding high quality grass to calves and heifers.
  - If you have them on good grass they will gain 0.8 Kgs per day (100 Kgs in 125 days).
- ▶ Practice the Leader-Follower system.
  - Calves graze in front of the heifers or cows.
  - Calves will “do” really well with no adverse effect on the heifers.
  - Parasites will have no effect on the calves as they will be diluted.

- ▶ Or let the calves graze some of the cow paddocks.
  - Let them into covers of 900-1,100 Kgs DM.
  - Let them graze out the area in 3-4 days and then move on to next area.
  - Some baling may have to be done on these paddocks next time round.
- ▶ All farms have late, “weak” calves.
  - Let these graze in front of the main bunch of calves on the very best of grass, or,
  - If that isn’t possible give them fresh grass in front of cows or heifers,
  - 1-2 Kgs of meal could be justified to these but don’t keep them near the house in a “calf paddock” to feed meals because parasites will prevent thrive, or,
  - Adopt the ‘buddy-buddy’ system where two small calves are put in each cow paddock and leave them there, even as cows come to the paddock. They will thrive really well and no meals or dosing is needed.
  - It is best to give best quality grass and no meals than to give them poor quality grass with meals.
- ▶ No meals should be fed to strong calves. The response is poor, requiring 8 Kgs of meal to give 1 Kg weight gain.
- ▶ To prevent stomach worms with minimum dosing, keep calves on aftergrass as long as possible. Give a white or yellow dose in early July and move to aftergrass.
  - Under target weight incalf heifers (they should all be in-calf now) should be grazed in front of main bunch or run with the calves so as to get best grass.

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- It is absolutely essential to get the weights as described above from the contract rearer. You don't want any animals underweight and no excessively over target weights.
- ▶ The use of excessive quantities of dosing in calves, as distinct from grazing management to control parasites, will result in young and old cows with low immunity. Thereby having to be dosed regularly as cows.

## SPRAY FOR WEEDS

- ▶ At a time when farmers need to grow as much grass as possible (16+ ton DM/ha), it doesn't make sense to have weeds growing where grass should grow.
- ▶ Weeds and docks are costing farmers serious money, probably €10 - €25 per acre in lost grass production.
- ▶ Docks are a major economic cost to farmers because one dock (big one) every 35m<sup>2</sup> reduces grass growth by 1 per cent per acre.
  - As a rough guide every big dock in that area causes losses of €7 - €13.
  - Decide on the spray to use; a decision mainly based on clover content of pasture.
  - Any serious, economical minded dairy farmer must protect clover if he has it,
  - The main dock sprays are (S = safe for clover): Eagle(S), Envy, Pastor trio, DoxstarPRO, Forefront, Uproot and Prospect (S but doesn't kill Curled dock)
  - These plus D 50 kill most other weeds.
  - Best results are got by spraying 3-4 weeks after cutting silage.
  - Grass growth is slow relative to the growth of the dock.
  - Grass ground cover is low resulting in lower loss of grass yield.
  - Spray now in July or August when there is great heat in the ground.
  - Spray on warm, sultry days.
  - Give serious consideration to spot spraying where docks are not too plentiful.
- ▶ Where weed infestation is low we should "spot-spray" to minimise cost, be more effective and be a lot better environmentally.

- ▶ The best time to spray for ragwort is December-January with Forefront T.

## SOWING CLOVER

- ▶ Because a good clover sward can fix up to four bags of CAN/acre and based on Clonakilty trial, results in 30kgs/cow more MS, and because of Nitrogen restrictions, we must consider establishing clover swards.
- ▶ In what situations should we consider its use?
  - Definitely on outside blocks of land used for silage or heifer replacement where lower levels of bag N would be in use.
  - If you have good perennial swards that are free of docks on the milking platform you can over-sow clover into it.
  - If there are old grasses present, ploughing and tilling a clover/perennial seed mix should be embarked on.
- ▶ Soil fertility is very important, particularly lime (pH 6.5+) and P & K indices 3+.
- ▶ If thinking of over-sowing do so after taking an early 2nd cut silage or baling a grazing paddock but it must have been cut very low to slow down regrowth.
  - The seeding rate should be 2kgs/acre mixed with 0:7:30 or even soybean meal to very specific calibrations on the fertiliser spreader.
  - Spread slurry after sowing to give light cover to the seed and slow down regrowth and pray for rain!
  - Generally, no nitrogen should be applied for the remainder of the year.
  - The grass should be grazed frequently, at covers of less than 1000kgs DM
- ▶ Take advice from your adviser before embarking on this venture.

## FINALLY

- ▶ Average farm cover should be 180/cow, increasing from end of month.
- ▶ At 2000 milkings, that is now, liners should be changed.
- ▶ Have you gone out recently to a film with your partner?
- ▶ Have you planned a holiday?



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