

Messages:

- ▶ November is a big planning month.
- ▶ Stop grazing when target grass covers are reached.
- ▶ Mastitis control for 2020 begins now.
- ▶ Dry cow management depends on silage quality and cow BCS.
- ▶ Only feed meals to animals in need
- ▶ Replacement heifer management must be high priority now.
- ▶ Apply Lime, P. and K this November

NOVEMBER A BIG PLANNING MONTH

- ▶ With milk price under pressure, costs increasing, calf issues and environmental concerns, dairy farmers must be very careful with spending and investment.
- ▶ Planning, starting now, will be essential to successfully negotiate these challenges.
- ▶ Some dairy farmers, because they will want to save on costs or can't afford to, will spend little or no money on certain essential management actions this November – this could have serious consequences in 2020. The essentials are: dry cow treatment, cow BCS, replacement heifer weight targets, investment in lime P & K, labour for spring, pay essential creditors, adequate land area for the livestock planned for 2020.
- ▶ Financial planning, which most farmers are very neglectful of, starts now:
 - To do a financial plan now you must update your 2019 financial accounts. This is possible because very few financial transactions take place in December – you will be 95–98 per cent accurate. This gives you a lead into the 2020 plan – where you can reduce cost and where you can expect to make more sales. All advice suggests we make plans at 28c/l base milk price.
 - From this you will know the quantities of: fertiliser (€450/ha), meal (500–600kgs/cow), veterinary products and medicine, dairy products (30–40cc/cow/day teat dip, etc.), insurance, etc.
 - With this information you should get three quotations/tenders from different merchants for each individual input.
- ▶ A lot of thought needs to be put into your labour requirement for 2020, both in terms of quantity and type.
 - One labour unit should, in an efficient set up, be able to manage 130–160 cows with extra help during the calving season.
 - Some large cow farmers get in a “night time calver”, which is a great idea! The idea should be considered by 2–3 medium sized farmers who might share one such person, operating to strict hygiene protocols.
 - How and where can I source this “help”? You must be proactive through all public media.
- ▶ Associated with labour is the need to “Contract rear calves”. This is determined by the acreage available to “carry planned livestock” in 2020 and not by spring

labour availability.

- ▶ Capital investments to be made:

STOP GRAZING WHEN TARGET COVERS REACHED

- ▶ Because grass will be invaluable next spring to minimise meal feeding levels, you must now end grazing when farm cover is 600 to 750kgs DM per ha. The former for 2.5 cows/ha and latter for 3.5 cows/ha with a range in between.
- ▶ Every day you delay closing in the autumn reduces spring available grass by 12kgs DM. Whereas every day you delay grazing in spring only increases yield by 8kgs DM. This is the most important decision and action you will take in November, so try to get it correct.
- ▶ As grass grows less than 1–3 kg DM/ha./day over the winter, and if you need an opening cover of 900 (2019 proved we can deal with covers of up to 1100) then you must close at over 750kg DM if stocked at 3.5 cows/ha on milking platform. To close at these covers you may have to leave one or two paddocks with covers of 1500–1600. If you don't know what I am talking about, contact your adviser immediately – your discussion group or other grass training workshops can help.
- ▶ Farm covers over 2300 lose quality very fast, therefore, where that has arisen get extra stock in to eat off.
- ▶ Over 70 per cent of the grazing area must be grazed off and closed by 5–6th November. If that not done and a high proportion remains you must get in extra stock to get that proportion eaten off as soon as possible.
- ▶ Therefore, mind the grass, ration the silage and feed some meals now.
- ▶ Every farmer should be using the autumn rotation planner to guide grass allocation per day but measurement must also be done so as to STOP grazing when target closing covers are arrived at.

MASTITIS CONTROL FOR 2020 BEGINS NOW!

- ▶ As the cure rate of mastitis/scc is 50–70 per cent with dry cow treatment, this is one cost that cannot be avoided.
- ▶ As it only cost €3–€7 per cow, dry cow treatment represents great value for money and the best return for money.
- ▶ Some farmers are not using any antibiotic dry cow treatment on cows who have had no clinical mastitis during the year and on the last SCC test were under 150,000 and consistently under it during the year. Use teat seal only as per listed below. This is to be recommended, as are Moorepark, so as to prevent the over use of antibiotics when not required.
- ▶ Dry off cows that:
 - Are within 56 days of calving
 - Have a daily milk yield of 7 litres (0.7kg MS) or less per day
 - That have SCC levels of over 300,000,
 - First calver that have milked for 270 day, and,
 - Thin cows, being particularly concerned about high yielders, who “milk off their backs”.
- ▶ Drying off cows is not an easy task and much care, time and planning must be set aside for the job.

- ▶ The following suggestions should be taken on board:
 - Treat all quarters of each cow with the same treatment.
 - CMT (California Mastitis Test) test cows prior to drying off to identify problem quarters. In problem quarters, administer one lactating cow tube every 12 hours for 3 milkings prior to drying off. All milk should be discarded during this procedure.
 - Dry cow antibiotic tubes and/or teat sealant should be administered after the final milking.
 - Milk out the quarter fully before infusing the dry cow antibiotic/sealant.
 - Disinfect the teat end – vigorously, rub the teat end for 10-15 seconds with cotton wool soaked in methylated spirits.
 - Do not contaminate the nozzle of the antibiotic tube before insertion into the teat canal.
 - Infuse the contents of the antibiotic tube into the quarter – hold teat-end firmly between thumb and forefinger and with other hand, gently massage the antibiotic upwards into the teat (NOTE: This is not done with teat seal).
 - Teat spray (post milking teat disinfectant) treated quarters immediately after infusion at a rate of 20 cc/cow.
- Record cow number, date and product details of all dry cow treatments
- Mark the cow (leg band or spray paint on udder) so that cows that have received dry cow antibiotic therapy can be readily recognised.
- Do not leave cows in yards or soiled areas in the period immediately after dry cow therapy application.
- Maintain dry cows separate from the milking herd if possible and put dry cows in clean, dry paddocks (particularly for the first two weeks after drying-off) to reduce teat exposure to environmental mastitis bacteria.
- The cow is at a greater risk of new infection for the first 3 weeks after drying off.
- Keep a close eye on cows to identify new infections.
- ▶ Some farmers are teat sealing heifers now; but if being done, because you have heifers calving down with mastitis, then it must be done extremely carefully and is a tough job.
- ▶ You should cull cows that:
 - Had 3 or more clinical cases this year and had 2-3 high SCC readings during the year.
 - It is a waste of money treating these cows as they will continue to spread infection to other cows



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next year.

- Sell these cows in November.

PARASITES AND HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Firstly cows need good facilities:
 - Each cow has a cubicle, that is, 50 cows need 50 - 55 cubicles.
 - Each cow has 2 ft. of head space if being fed meals.
 - Each cow has 0.75 to 1.0 ft. silage feeding space.
 - Cubicle and yard surfaces are in good repair, kept clean every day.
 - Access to feeding area is adequate, and not restricted, with an access passage, 6ft wide, from cubicles to silage area every 5-6 cubicles.
 - Cows have adequate ventilation, which is enough inlet and outlet area, with no draughts.
 - Daily you should walk carefully through your cows, not looking over the rail, to ensure none are sick, lame, stressed, free of mastitis, and putting on body condition.
- ▶ Because parasites reduce animal performance we must deal with them.
- ▶ Weanlings must be dosed at housing for ostertagia type two stomach worms.
- ▶ You never know when Fluke hits; therefore; if in doubt get a dung sample tested through your vet; but, if in doubt dose all stock, including cows, for fluke. Remember, all fluke doses have a milk withholding period, so it is best not done until drying off.
- ▶ All animals will need to be treated for lice at housing.
- ▶ Lameness must be addressed and prevented by:
 - Having good and adequate facilities, but overcrowding, poor ventilation, with bad surfaces and poor nutrition management are real issues.
 - Getting the Farm Relief Service to examine the whole herd and deal with lame cows has real merit – experts know what they are doing!
 - A footbath 3 consecutive days every month will have merit if there is a problem on the farm.
- ▶ Consult your Vet on dosing/vaccination management now to alleviate these tasks in spring.

DRY COW MANAGEMENT DEPENDS ON SILAGE AND BCS

- ▶ There is a great temptation to milk on thin cows to generate cash flow.
- ▶ Cows that are dried off thin will calve down thin which will result in:
 - calving difficulties
 - poor milk yields next year, as every 50kgs below target (1 condition score) will result in a loss of 450 litres
 - surveys show that cows calving down in body condition scores (BCS) of less than 3.00 have a lower chance of going in-calf
- ▶ Drying off thin cows in early November means they need no meals during the dry period if the silage is good. The cheapest way of managing thin cows this autumn/winter is to dry off early and feed no meal if

silage is good enough – see Table 1.

- ▶ Divide up your cows into three groups, based on condition score (C.S.):
- ▶ Group (1): BCS 2.75 - 3.25. Most of the herd will be in this group and will need no special attention with silage 68 per cent DMD or better.
- ▶ Group (2): BCS 2.75 or less. For sure these cows need meal, the amount depending on the quality of silage (see Table 1) and, if calving in Feb must be dried off in early Nov. A cow that is 2.75 BCS now and due to calve in early Feb in a BCS of 3.25 and being fed 68 per cent DMD silage; she has 84 days to calving of which there are 40 days where no BCS is added. Therefore, she only has 44 “effective” days for meal feeding and she need to put on extra 0.5 BCS or approx 25 - 30kgs of weight. This will require 150+kgs of meal or 3.4 kgs/cow/day for the 44 days. Therefore, the meal feeding period is too short
- ▶ Group (3): BCS 3.25+ cows. As cows that are very fat at calving down will underperform by milking poorly and have a lower incalf rate next year.
 - Some farmers push on the left over silage from groups (1) or (2) to these animals.
 - Other farmers will feed only 5 Kgs DM per day of silage with straw. That means only giving them 25-30 Kgs of fresh (20 per cent DM) silage per cow per day plus 4-5 kgs fresh straw.

Table 1: Recommendations for dry cow feeding (10-12 weeks dry period)

Silage DMD	Body Condition Score at Drying-Off			
	< 2.5	2.5	2.75	> 3.0
> 72	Sil + 1 Kg	Sil ad-lib	Sil Restr.	Restr.
68 - 72	Sil + 2 Kg	Sil + 1 Kg	Sil ad-lib	Restr.
64 - 68	Sil + 3 Kg	Sil + 2 Kg	Sil + 1 Kg	Ad-lib
60 - 64	Sil + 4 Kg	Sil + 3 Kg	Sil + 2 Kg	Sil + 1 Kg

Sil = Silage Restr = Restrict

- Some farmers see this three grouping requirement as impractical but it will result in 3-4 more cows per 100 being incalf, less calving problems, less feed wasted on fat cows and more milk per cow next year. If separate grouping is an issue with you, then, you must invest a small amount of money in this requirement.

MEALS TO ANIMALS IN NEED

- ▶ Many farmers will decide to feed no meal to any stock. This may be the correct decision if all stock are meeting target weight gains but no animals should be fed meals except:
 - Milking cows (2-4kg, 16-17 per cent P), if grass is tight and silage is poor
 - Small weanlings (1-2kg 14 per cent P ration);
 - Small in-calf heifers (1-2kg 14 per cent P ration);
 - Autumn calvers; feed 3-8kg, depending on grass supply

REPLACEMENT HEIFER CARE

- ▶ First things first; weigh your weanling (called R1's) and your incalf (R2's) heifers now to see how they compare with the targets.
 - Targets: R1's and R2's should be 40 per cent and 80 per cent respectively of their mature weights. Mature weights are: HF = 580 kg; NZ/Br Fr = 550kg; J x HF = 545kg.
 - Then act on the results.
- ▶ On many farms, replacement heifers are below target weights at most stages in their lifetime, with the result that culling from 1st to 2nd lactations are very high. Being away over targets is also seriously damaging:
 - Weanlings gaining more than 0.8kg/day deposit too much udder fat and consequently milk poorly,
 - Heifers calving down 40+ kgs over target weights, while milking more in their 1st lactation, subsequently milk a lot less and suffer early culling.
- ▶ The target weights for 1st November are as follows:

Breed	Weanling (40 % Mature Wt)	In Calf Heifers (80 % Mature Wt.)
Holstein:	224 kg	448kg
British Fr/NZ Fr	220 kg	440 kg
Jersey x HF	218 kg	436 kg

- ▶ Animals under target should get extra meal. With good silage, for every 10kgs R1's are under target they need 40kgs of extra meal and for every 10 kgs R2's are under target they need an extra 60 kgs meal over a period to bring them to target.
- ▶ Heifers suffer on most farms at this time of year.
 - They are left to "run around" cleaning up bad pastures, either at home or particularly on out-farm blocks.
 - There is only 90-120 days to calving.
 - At an expected weight gain of 0.75 Kgs per day, you need 100 days to put on 75Kgs.
 - Remember the last 3-4 weeks before calving do not count for weight gain as the animal's intake is way below normal and she diverts most feed into calf growth.
 - Mix the incalf heifers with the 1st calvers so as to minimise stress now and particularly after calving when stress then can have a detrimental effect on her subsequent weight gain.
- ▶ Use Tables 2 & 3 to plan your meal feeding strategy for your weanlings.
 - Meals will give the following weight gains:
 - » 1kg and 2 Kgs of meal will give 0.25 and 0.4 Kgs gain per day respectively.
 - » Weanlings should be fed to gain at least 0.5Kgs per head per day. Some will have to gain more to catch up.
- ▶ At grass next spring they should gain 0.75Kgs.(60 days of Mar and Apr X 0.75=45 kgs). From this information you can decide what management treatment animals of various weights require.

Table 2: Meal requirements for Weanling Heifers on Silage.

Weanling	Silage DMD		
	65	70	75
Gain on Silage only (kg/day)	0.24	0.41	0.58
Light Weanlings			
(Meal to give 0.7kg/day)	2.0	1.4	0.5
Heavy Weanlings			
(Meal required to give 0.5kg/day)	1.0	0.4	.*

*Because of the good response to meals at low levels, feed at least 1kg/day to all weanlings until January.

- ▶ It is obvious from above that: Silage must be analysed (contract rearers must do also) A weighing scales is essential to manage heifer target weights, therefore, discussion groups should buy one together.
- ▶ With good management weanlings that are 20 per cent under target would achieve target mating weights.
- ▶ All this information is essential to bring to the attention of contract calf rearer's so that subsequent hassle doesn't arise.

We have had cases where the owner of the animals has been very thrusting of the rearer's ability, based on past history, and hasn't monitored silage quality and animal target weights. There is only one loser in that situation!

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Table 3: Protein levels (%) in meal required to supplement silage of different per cent Proteins,

Kg Meal	% Protein in Silage			
	8%	10%	12%	14%
2kg	20%	18%	16%	14%
3kg	18%	16%	14%	12%

- ▶ Manage replacement health care as above.
 - Many farmers give the Lepto vaccine now or earlier to R1's to minimise spring work.

SOIL FERTILITY IS LIMITING GRASS YIELD:

- ▶ According to G Ramsbottom, Teagasc, the Top 25 per cent of farmers utilise 2.3 tons grass dry matter more than the average farmer doing Profit Monitors to achieve €616/ha more profit. There are many factors but soil fertility will be high in the list of differences.

- Over 90 per cent of farmers' fields are deficient in either lime, P & K.
 - » Low P. results in yield of grass being reduced by 10-30 per cent
 - » Low K. results in yields of grass being reduced by 5-15 per cent
 - » Low calcium (lime levels) also results in poor yields, death of perennial ryegrasses and poor use of nitrogen fertiliser.
- Do a soil test now and do it regularly, every 2-3 years.
- ▶ Apply LIME now (if and when weather dries up) – it is the cheapest of all nutrient inputs and gives the most benefit.
- ▶ The basic Phosphorous requirements for 2.5cows/ha with Index 3 are 19 units for grazing plus 16 and 25 units extra for 1 and 2 cuts of silage respectively and 33

units of K for grazing plus 98 and 127 extra for 1 and 2 cuts of silage respectively per ha. A lot of P and K, but that's what has to be applied.

- As a base dressing (per acre) now apply 2 bags 0:10:20 now for grazing and 3-4 bags 0:7:30 – that's for Index 3. If you are Index 1 or 2 you need a lot more.

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