

MESSAGES:

- ▶ **To achieve most set GOALS for your personal & business life.**
- ▶ **Management: Measure – Assess – Plan – Do – Review**
- ▶ **Establish tons of grass utilised and analyse ‘why low’.**
- ▶ **Analyse why your 6-week calving rate was low in 2020.**
- ▶ **Address herd health prevention issues.**
- ▶ **Feed dry cow mineral from 15th December.**

GOAL SETTING IS KEY FOR YOURSELF & STAFF

- ▶ Start with this as your New Year resolution. (My thanks to Paidi Kelly, Moorepark, and Lynaire Ryan for their contributions to these goal setting notes.)
- ▶ It might not be very “cool” to talk about one’s goals, but it is common in all progressive farming communities around the world.
 - ▶ In an Irish context many of us may not have them written down but we have them in the “back of our head”.
 - ▶ We are asking you to write them down and share with family and other significant others.
 - ▶ There is lots of research to prove that those who have goals compared with those who do not, achieve more in life.
- ▶ Why is it important?
 - ▶ You will be aiming to achieve the things that are important to you (not someone else)
 - ▶ Is your ladder up against the right wall?
 - ▶ You can achieve big things by doing the right things over a long period.
 - ▶ Your goals guide you on actions you should take
 - ▶ Motivation – know your “why” so as to manage the inevitable challenges/ disappointments of life.
- ▶ Three-stage process:

(Key principle - should be done with significant other to make sure they are on the same page)

 1. Where are you now? Objective assessment of where you currently are, and where your business currently is. To do this well follow the following steps:
 - ▶ SWOT for you personally,
 - ▶ SWOT for your business,
 - ▶ Benchmark yourself against other good businesses to ensure the SWOT is accurate,
 - ▶ Separately get some other ‘shrew’ people to do a SWOT on you, because often we aren’t honest with ourselves! Compare both and adjust your own.
 - ▶ There are SWOT analysis worksheets available.
 - ▶ Review your practices vs what the best are doing – what are you not doing?
 - ▶ Review your last 5 years.
 - ▶ What were the highs and what were the lows?
 - ▶ What lessons did you learn and take forward for the next five years?
 - ▶ This should help you assess what your values are – the things that are most important to you in life/ farming.
 - ▶ Where do we want to be?
 - ▶ What would you like your life to look like in 2-5-10 years’ time?
 - ▶ Write down your short – medium – long term goals. Break it down into a process of getting there.
 - ▶ List out your business and personal goals. Essential to have both.
 - ▶ What do you want to achieve and why? Helpful question – state your goal and explain to yourself by adding ‘so that’. For example, “My goal is to milk 100 cows so that...”
 - ▶ Or, ask “why” 3 times about any goal to get to the key aspect of it: E.g. I want to set up another unit – why? To make more money? Why? To create cash to buy land if it comes up beside home farm? Why? To have a retirement pension.
 - ▶ What do you want to avoid and why?
 - ▶ What are the things that are likely to prevent me from achieving my goals? This is a very powerful question to ask.
 - ▶ Goals must be SMART and written down.
 - ▶ Make a BHAG – Big Hairy Audacious Goal, to stretch the imagination of what’s possible.
 - ▶ Throw out a few mad ideas and see how they sit, eg: “I want to be president of Ireland”!
 - ▶ How are we going to get there?
 - ▶ Break your goals down into key areas and plan what actions need to be taken?
 - ▶ What are the key processes you need to execute to unlock your goals?
 - ▶ Do you have a good team around you to deliver?

Group/ mentor/ friends you share your goals with

- ▶ What are the key risks and how are you going to manage them?
- ▶ Review your written your goals every so often to get motivation/ to reassure you that you on right path.
- ▶ Encourage your staff to have goals and if associated with your business, review them at the end of each year with them individually.

MANAGEMENT = MEASURE + ASSESS + PLAN + DO + REVIEW

- ▶ This is a very big month for planning the success of your farm for 2021.
 - ▶ The way successful businesses, and farming is no exception, go about their business is:
 - ▶ Measure
 - ▶ Assess
 - ▶ Plan
 - ▶ Do
 - ▶ Review
- ▶ To be a successful, profitable dairy farmer there are only two KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) you must achieve:
 1. Tons of grass utilised per hectare on the farm
 2. Your 6-week calving rate (%)

We must add in cost control measures as being essential also.
- ▶ Measure:
 - ▶ Grass utilised is calculated on the Moorepark Grass Calculator.
 - ▶ The 6-week calving rate is done for you in the Calving report for your herd on the ICBF web page. Simple!
 - ▶ Common cost and common profit must be established for year end, using the profit monitor.
- ▶ Assess where your achievements are relative to target

(see Appendix), and,

- ▶ Plan: Make a plan as to how you are going to move from where you are to where you should be,
- ▶ Do next year's plan at end before end of 2020: men are great procrastinator's, rarely doing what they say they will do; but with whole family commitment to the plan it will make it easier for you to "do it".
- ▶ Review at the end of the following year what you said you would do. To realistically move forward now you must review this year under the listed criteria above and those in Appendix.

TONS OF GRASS UTILISED PER HA

- ▶ This figure is calculated using the Moorepark Grass Calculator. This is the most important efficiency figure you must establish for your farm. Get the programme from the Teagasc web page or I have it. It is so simple to use.
- ▶ The data required to generate the tons utilised in 2020 are:
 - ▶ Farm size; the average number of cows, 0-1yrs, 1-2yrs; cows and heifers calved in each month; the number of 1st & 2nd calvers; the let-out and housing dates (N & D); the litres of milk sold and fed to calves plus the %F & P for the year; the total tons of meal fed to all stock plus any purchased silage as well as silage you have left over at the end of the year.
- ▶ Based on this data inputted the programme will generate the following information:
 - ▶ Tons of grass utilised (target 13+tons/ha),
 - ▶ Feed conversion efficiency (kgs MS produced ton DM). The target is 80+ but depends,
 - ▶ Stocking rate/ha – target depends,
 - ▶ Grazing season length – target 280 days but 265+ is very good.
 - ▶ The % of diet supplied by home grown grass –



target 90%+,

- ▶ kgs Milk Solids (MS) per cow and per hectare.
- ▶ In assessing why your tons utilised is below target, ask yourself; Is it because of:
 - ▶ Over use of meals,
 - ▶ Low soil fertility or pH,
 - ▶ Poor drainage, wet farm, poaching or soil compaction,
 - ▶ Poor grass varieties,
 - ▶ Poor infra-structures,
 - ▶ Poor grazing management techniques,
 - ▶ Consistently under-grazing resulting in topping,
 - ▶ Severe over-grazing,
 - ▶ Grazing too low pre-grazing covers,
 - ▶ Poor grazing management techniques,
 - ▶ Stocking rate, either too low or too high,
 - ▶ Stock bull bred cows (grossly inefficient),
 - ▶ Too many late calvers,
 - ▶ Not forgetting weather effect (comparing the change in yield from one year to the next in a discussion group isolates this as an individual farmer effect) etc.
- ▶ We know that for every 10% extra grass in the cows' diet, costs will be reduced by 3 cents/litre and profit increases by €185/ha.
- ▶ Really good reasons to establish the tons of grass utilised, so that, based on your assessment of the reasons, you can make plans to improve next year.
- ▶ Write out your plan of action.
- ▶ Prioritise the tasks you have to address.
 - ▶ Can I get by with less meals to cows (target is 0.9kgs meal per kg milk solid produced)?
 - ▶ Do I need to soil test?
 - ▶ Do I need better infra-structures?
 - ▶ How do I compact calve?
 - ▶ What must I change with my grazing management practices?
 - ▶ Do I need to measure grass and have I the skills to do it?
- ▶ Next December 2021, REVIEW what you did and achieved by way of grass utilised per ha. The same review should take place so that you can compare years and monitor progress.

6-WEEK CALVING RATE

- ▶ The target is 90%. For every 1% your herd is below that target you are losing €8.26 for every cow in your herd.

Therefore, for the average Irish dairy farmer with 70 cows and a 6-week calving rate of 58% (national average) he is losing €18,502. Serious loss!

- ▶ Look up ICBF for your figure. Why is it less than 90%? Based on the answers you and your team come up with, make a plan to rectify mistakes made in 2017.
- ▶ For this month, to improve the 6-week calving rate in 2022, you need to seriously address cow BCS and feed according to silage quality and the length of dry period remaining.
 - ▶ Firstly, you must now check the BCS of all cows. Cows over 3.25 should be put on restricted silage if very good and continue milking on.
 - ▶ Essentially, cows now on BCS of 2.75 or less should be on 2kgs meal for December and 10 days in January with silage of 70 DMD or lower and for sure should be dried off.

RE-CHECK YOUR ANIMAL HEALTH PROGRESS

- ▶ Rechecking on animal health issues now will pay very well in reduced spending costs and give more productive performances.
- ▶ What daily checks should you be making now?
 - ▶ “Prevention is better than cure”; act on that advice!
- ▶ Lameness, not only afflicts the cows but all animals.
 - ▶ ‘Tender’ footer animals should be removed and cared for because weight gain will be reduced by 50%
 - ▶ Have you done a whole herd preventative programme on the cows – the FDS do a very cost effective job.
 - ▶ My friend, Abigail Ryan, Teagasc, reminds me that “every cow should be examined and pared at drying off; preferably by a professional. A cow should not be hoof pared 1 month before calving as her tissue growth has almost stopped.”
 - ▶ She also noted: “Walking cows’ long distances after calving is an absolute disaster; the biological explanation is that her tendons are really loose after calving so they need time to tighten up. If you send her on long walking journeys it takes the tendons longer to heal and enlarges them even more”
 - ▶ Regular cleaning of passages and yard are obvious requirements.

- ▶ Overcrowding is a very serious problem on most farms. Animals will grossly underperform if short of “resting space”.
 - ▶ You need at least one cubicle per cow/weanling/incalf heifer, otherwise stress becomes an issue resulting in many more health problems
 - ▶ Check if cow/heifers are not using cubicles – take time to train them.
 - ▶ Are any dry cows’ quarters swelling due to Mastitis?
 - ▶ Am I doing enough to prevent mastitis?
 - ▶ Are yards, cubicles, etc. clean?
 - ▶ Is rainwater entering the slurry tank?
 - ▶ Such waste of space and money spreading water.
 - ▶ There may be a case to be made for collecting and storing rainwater with all the talk of charges for water.
 - ▶ Have any animals got physical injury, even minor? Check out what caused the problem and repair.
 - ▶ Do you think the animals are eating as much silage as usual?
 - ▶ Ask yourself why not?
 - ▶ It may be due to poor pH, low DMD or high dry matter; the last reason would be ok but the other two should give cause for concern.
 - ▶ Also, too little lying and feeding space resulting in ‘bullying’ can be an issue.
 - ▶ Have another look at the lice situation. Are they showing signs of scratching or licking their coats? The product you used may not have worked.
 - ▶ Both liver and rumen fluke are too big a problem to ignore. Check dung samples and act.
 - ▶ Your milking machine must be checked over by your technician so that it doesn’t affect cow health and performance next year. Do it now when your technician isn’t too busy.
 - ▶ You should do a review of your grassland infrastructure.
 - ▶ Be aware of the new EU requirements.
 - ▶ Have you adequate roadways that have a good surface and are wide enough?
 - ▶ Have you an adequate supply of water?
 - ▶ Is paddock size adequate for a minimum of 24hrs, more particularly 36hrs grazing for the herd?
 - ▶ Any changes being made should take account of herd size in 10-15 years’ time and the new EU regulations.
 - ▶ What is your soil fertility level?
 - ▶ Lime, phosphorous and potassium level on farms are extremely worrying. The result is we are not growing enough grass and the perennial ryegrasses are dying out.
 - ▶ What are you doing about it? The minimum is to get soil samples taken and act this December to save tax.
 - ▶ Potash is a product that helps grass overcome the winter effect of frost.
- ### DRY COW MINERALS FROM 15 DECEMBER
- ▶ Farmers who are starting to calve cows from the 1st February will need to start feeding dry cow minerals from 20th December (40 days before calving). It will cost €2.50 - €3.00 per cow for the season. Late calving cows don’t need minerals for another 6-8 weeks (save money).
 - ▶ Dry cow minerals are necessary to prevent:
 - ▶ Retained placenta (costs €500, due to Selenium, Vitamin E, or Iodine deficiency.
 - ▶ Calf deaths (each death costs €470), due to copper/iodine deficiency.
 - ▶ Milk fever (costs €312/case) due to too much calcium.
 - ▶ Urine drinking due to sodium (salt) deficiency.
 - ▶ Reduced appetite due to several minerals and vitamins.
 - ▶ Poor thrive due to several minerals and vitamins.
 - ▶ Feed 100- 120 grams per cow per day of pre-calving mineral. Spread half in morning and half in evening on top of the silage. It is very doubtful if buckets or free access to minerals is safe for all cows.
 - ▶ Make sure your mineral mix meets your deficiency requirements on the farm:
 - ▶ Most silages are deficient in Iodine, Copper, Sodium, Selenium, Cobalt, Phosphorous, and Magnesium.
 - ▶ More recently the major elements, particularly phosphorous, are deficient in some silage.
 - ▶ A silage analysis can identify your problem minerals and, for sure, should be done.
- ### SEASONAL GREETINGS
- Make sure to take it really easy for a week or so. To all my readers may I wish you a very Happy Christmas!