

*Messages:*

- ▶ **Prepare yourself to be a better Operation Manager in 2021**
- ▶ **November is a big planning month.**
- ▶ **Stop grazing when target grass covers are reached.**
- ▶ **Dry cow treatment needs to be done carefully,**
- ▶ **Dry cow management depends on silage quality and cow BCS.**
- ▶ **Manage replacement heifer based on their weights.**
- ▶ **Address soil fertility this November.**

**By Matt Ryan**

### OPERATION'S MANAGER: How good are you?

- ▶ In an Irish context an operation's manager may be a farm owner managing his/her own farm or increasingly managing multiple units.
- ▶ Operations managers are responsible for ensuring the farm business runs efficiently and that all parts are working towards achieving farm goals and targets. They have sound financial, strategic and farm system capabilities.
- ▶ He/she is able to exert influence at all levels of business, be it conflict resolution, having difficult conversations; but he/she must be inquisitive by nature.
- ▶ Their responsibilities are divided up between on-farm and financial:
- ▶ Milking:
  - ▶ Sets milking policy, with the aim of driving efficient work routine, quality product and production.
  - ▶ Develops and communicates the milk harvesting policy for the farm.
- ▶ Monitors and analyses milk production results and milk quality, daily, weekly and yearly, and takes appropriate actions.
- ▶ Animal care:
  - ▶ Develops health, calving and mating plans, evaluates outcomes and takes appropriate action.
  - ▶ Develops, communicates and monitors the animal handling, health and welfare policies for the farm,
  - ▶ Develops and communicates the calving and calf rearing plan, and analyses results with appropriate actions.
  - ▶ Develops and communicates the mating/breeding plan, and analyses results with appropriate actions.
  - ▶ All analyses must be ongoing, be they daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or yearly.
- ▶ Feed plans:
  - ▶ Establishes feed budgets strategies and plan. Sources competitive, quality supplement .....and directs efficient use of supplement.
- ▶ Sets and communicates the grassland, the reseeding and cropping plans for the farm,
- ▶ Develops and communicates the feed policy for the farm. Keeps up to date with the latest feed research/technology, and maximises opportunities to improve performance
- ▶ Sets and communicates the pasture management policy, so that all staff can implement at all times.
- ▶ Sets and communicates the supplementation policy/
- ▶ Environment:
  - ▶ Develops effluent, water, nutrient, environmental plans.
  - ▶ Sets all on-farm policies regarding effluent disposal, in line with statutory requirements.
  - ▶ Develops a sustainable environmental management plan for the farm in line with compliance requirements.
  - ▶ Sets all on-farm policies regarding the nutrient management plan, and the link to fertiliser policy.
  - ▶ Ensures all environmental plans are carried out so as to avoid penalty and required maintenance work is also carried out.
- ▶ People management:
  - ▶ Decides staff requirement, initiates procurement and appropriate training.
  - ▶ Encourages a team culture and supports farm values and goals with a strong health, safety & wellbeing culture.
  - ▶ Has a clear plan to achieve the goals of their own career development, and develops systems to ensure the farm team understands and supports skill development and career growth.
  - ▶ Understands and abides by employment obligations, and resolves any staff issues around remuneration to ensure best practice.
  - ▶ Builds a team culture to support the farm's values and goals, and monitors and manages staff to ensure productive working relationships, build people capability, and avoid conflict in the workplace.
  - ▶ Communicates with the farm manager to ensure work times and workloads for the farm team meet best practice and comply with legal obligations, and seeks to resolve any issues.
  - ▶ You are responsible for wages, recruitment, application of employment law and liable for any legal oversight.
- ▶ Machine, vehicles & technology:
  - ▶ Researches technology to increase efficiency on farm and sets policy with the Farm manager,
  - ▶ Uses up-to-date data and technology software to analyse and improve farm performance, and ensures that the staff are well trained on it's uses.
  - ▶ Ensures the farm team follows best practice around vehicles and machinery safety and hygiene, and complies with regulatory requirements.
- ▶ Health, safety & wellbeing
  - ▶ Promotes a health, safety & wellbeing culture by having appropriate protocols in place.
  - ▶ Demonstrates to others that they are important by having a

budget for same and allowing training time off-farm.

- ▶ Reports and records all accidents and near misses according to workplace legislation.
- ▶ Demonstrates to others they clearly value wellbeing, by allowing adequate budget and training time.
- ▶ Ensures regular monitoring and updating occurs.
- ▶ Financial – an essential business requirement:
  - ▶ Sets budgets for the farm or with farm owners and/or farm manager during the first month of the year; having reviewed the previous financial year's plan/outcomes, and processes.
  - ▶ Analyses benchmarking results to improve farm performance.
  - ▶ Gathers and analyses business information to develop farm budgets, and communicates these to the farm team.
  - ▶ Monitors the financial systems, processes, plans by monthly, quarterly and annual reviews to ensure the farm business is meeting its financial goals. Reviews will take place with staff and farm owners where necessary. Communicates outcome with farm owner and staff.
- ▶ Strategic Planning – a business requirement:
  - ▶ Analyses benchmarking results to improve farm performance.
  - ▶ Manages key risks for the business.
  - ▶ Sets performance targets and goals for the farm and/or with farm owners.
  - ▶ Develops and effectively implements a business plan, and understands industry (or agri-organisation) marketing methods, and on-farm marketing methods for an agribusiness product.

## MAKE YOUR PLANS IN NOVEMBER

- ▶ With 2021 on the horizon we have a lot of uncertainties on our minds with Brexit, Covid and environmental pressures. Dealing with milk price changes, costs increasing, calf issues, the effect of Covid on labour availability and environmental concerns, dairy farmers must be very careful with spending and investment. Definitely no expensive short or long-term leases.
- ▶ Planning, starting now, will be essential to successfully negotiate these challenges. Relevant and realistic figures must be used when making financial and efficiency plans.
- ▶ First up by way of planning is spend on the essentials this November - don't leave until December. This will ensure that you have a full set of financial accounts to do your 2021 plan in December. 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 2021.
- ▶ Financial planning, which most farmers are very neglectful of, starts now:
  - ▶ To do a financial plan now you must update your 2020

financial accounts. This is possible because very few financial transactions take place in December – you will be 95 -98% accurate. This gives you a lead into the 2021 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. Take delivery in early Jan so as not to waste time when busy.
- ▶ A lot of thought needs to be put into your labour requirement for 2021, both in terms of quantity and type.
- ▶ Ask yourself how you 'got on' last year; if poorly get more help for next spring.
- ▶ 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 outlets.
- ▶ Talk to the FRS now and if taking on 'help', be it student or other, take him/her on in early January so that you have 'taught; him/her what they need to know.
- ▶ Associated with labour is the need to "Contract rear calves". This is determined by the acreage available to "carry planned livestock" in 2021 and not by spring labour availability. Don't wait until last minute to get your 'contract rearer' in place – do it now.

## NEXT 7 MONTH'S GRASS IS PLANNED TODAY

- ▶ Decisions made now directly or indirectly influence grass grown/growth rates to next May.
- ▶ Facts drive good decisions; Every extra day's grazing you achieve in autumn gives you €1.80/cow profit while the figure is €2.50/cow in springtime.
  - ▶ With good planning, even now, you can maximise both.
  - ▶ 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.
  - ▶ Grazing decisions now and actions taken are key to grass availability in spring and consequently profit.
- ▶ The key Autumn Cover Target Date is 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- ▶ You must know/decide your opening spring target average

farm cover (AFC) for 1st February. It will be between 800 and 1100kg DM/ha, depending on stocking rate. You will know, by consulting your growth rates on PastureBase, all your daily growth rates and winter ones which generally range between 1 – 5kg DM/day.

- ▶ From this, generally, you will be aiming to have an AFC on 1<sup>st</sup> December of 650 – 900 depending on stocking rate.
- ▶ If you plan to close up on 1st Nov, then you must work out the amount of grass you expect to grow in November and subtract from the 1st Dec target so as to know your 1st November closing target.
- ▶ There is a case too be made to close one or two paddocks with covers of 1500-1600 so as to have adequate grass in early March.
- ▶ If you are not into the detail of grass measurements contact your adviser immediately, your discussion group or other grass training workshops.
- ▶ Farm covers over 2300 at this time of year lose quality very fast, therefore, where that has arisen get extra stock in to eat off.
- ▶ Over 70% of the grazing area must be grazed off and closed by 5-6<sup>th</sup> November. If that is not done and a high proportion remains you must get in extra stock to get that proportion eaten off quickly.
- ▶ Therefore, keep grass in cows' diet as long as possible, 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. A grass budget must also be done – get help from your adviser.

### DRY COW TREATMENT IS A BIG JOB!

- ▶ Firstly, go to the AHI web site and view the videos to refresh your memory on the correct way to do this task.
- ▶ As the cure rate of mastitis/scc is 50-70% with dry cow treatment, this is one cost, €3-7/cow, that cannot be avoided.



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- ▶ 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 100,000 and consistently under it during the year. Use teat seal only as per listed below. This is to be recommended, 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. Don't do more than 20 cows together.
- ▶ The following suggestions should be taken on board:
  - ▶ Treat all quarters of each cow with the same treatment.
  - ▶ A milk recording 1 month before dry off plus a sensitivity test has merit.
  - ▶ Abruptly dry off all cow – no OAD milking.
  - ▶ Milk out the quarter fully before infusing the dry cow antibiotic/sealant.
  - ▶ Disinfect the teat end, starting from the back teats – 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, starting from the front teats.
  - ▶ 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.
  - ▶ Post treatment stand off cow on a clean yard for 1hour.
  - ▶ Maintain dry cows separate 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.
- ▶ It is not advised to teat seal heifers unless, historically, more than 2-3% of heifers have calved down with mastitis. But, if being done, 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 next year.

## DRY COW MANAGEMENT BY 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 back 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.
  - ▶ However, weight is put on more efficiently during milking (70 mj to put on 1 kg weight) compared to dry period (72mj). But it must be low % protein.
- ▶ 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% 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% 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% 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 these three grouping requirements 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 higher peak yield next April/May.
  - ▶ If separate grouping is an issue with you, then, you must invest a small amount of money in this requirement.

**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 (Table 1). Targets: R1's and R2's should be 40% and 80% respectively of their mature weights.

Table 2: Target weights (Kgs) for R1's and R2's on 1<sup>st</sup> November

Breed	Mature Wt.	R1's (40% Mature Wt)	R2's (80% Mature Wt.)
Holstein:	580	224	448
British Fr/NZ Fr	550	220	440
Jersey x HF	545	218	436

- ▶ Animals under target should get extra meal as per Tables 2 and 3:
  - ▶ 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.
  - ▶ Because of the good response to low level meals feeding, feed at least 1kg/day to all weanlings until January.

Table 3: Meal requirements for Weanling Heifers (R1's) on Silage.

	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	-*

It is obvious from above that:

1. Silage must be analysed (contract rearers must do so as well)
  2. A weighing scales is essential to manage heifer target weights, therefore, discussion groups should buy one together.
- ▶ All this information is essential to bring to the attention of contract calf rearer's so that subsequent hassle doesn't arise.

Table 4: Protein levels (%) in meal required to supplement silage of different % Proteins to R1's,

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

- ▶ Many farmers give the Lepto vaccine now or earlier to R1's to minimise spring work.
- ▶ Mix the incalf heifers with the 1<sup>st</sup> calvers so as to minimise stress now and particularly after calving when stress then can have a detrimental effect on her subsequent weight gain.

**Extra Bits of Advice:**

- ▶ Over 90% of farmers' fields are deficient in either lime, P & K.
  - ▶ Low P. results in yield of grass being reduced by 10-30%
  - ▶ Low K. results in yields of grass being reduced by 5-15%
  - ▶ 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 act. But apply the basic P, K and lime now.
- ▶ Animal health:
  - ▶ Engage with your Vet to get this task correct,
  - ▶ All animals must be treated for lice and fluke (get samples done)
  - ▶ R1's must be treated for worms at housing and maybe R2's but really they should not need a dose.

