

MESSAGES

- ▶ **As a manager, you must read the signs presented to you on the farm.**
- ▶ **AI Repeats are costly; check the cause and take action.**
- ▶ **How long should you AI for?**
- ▶ **Providing enough winter feed this year will be a big challenge.**
- ▶ **Grass cover drives all grazing decisions.**
- ▶ **Be careful with slurry to avoid losses and deaths!**
- ▶ **Manage replacement by their weight relative to target.**
- ▶ **Grow kale on suitable land – cheapest winter feed.**

By Matt Ryan

MANAGER: 'READ THE SIGNS'!

What do daily management occurrences indicate? If there is poor, low, decreasing or unacceptable performance by you or the animal, if not rectified quickly it will cost you a lot of money.

- ▶ Are too many cows repeating? The target non-return-rate (NRR) to 1st service is 70 per cent at 28 days. Heifers should be 5 per cent better.
- ▶ Changes in milk yield and quality:
 - ▶ Has milk yield decreased by greater than 2.5 per cent in the week? Why?
 - ▶ Is the fat /protein/lactose % up or down? Why?
 - ▶ Is the SCC and TBC up or down? Why?
 - ▶ Did we get caught with water or antibiotics in the milk? What went wrong?
- ▶ Have you too little or too much grass?
 - ▶ What is the pre-grazing cover? What can we do to correct?
 - ▶ What is the average farm cover (AFC)? What are the implications?
- ▶ Are our calves coughing?
 - ▶ If so, why? And what should be done?
 - ▶ Have calves dried dung around tail head? This can mean stomach worms.
 - ▶ Will you have enough winter feed next winter for the stock you plan to keep? This is one of your most important management checks for June and a very big challenge this year.

REPEATS ARE COSTLY; CHECK & ACT

- ▶ Each missed heat now results in €100 -150 per cow loss:
 - ▶ Check your ICBF Fertility Report for last year to see if you have “long repeat intervals”. A figure greater than 15 per cent in this box indicates you are missing heats.
 - ▶ Do farmers get concerned about a missed heat? If not, why not?
 - ▶ Apart from the financial loss it is very important to assess the situation now while things are ‘fresh in your memory’.
- ▶ Dairy farmers must now ask and answer three questions:
 - ▶ No. 1: What percentage (%) of cows and heifers are repeating?
 - ▶ No. 2: What does that indicate?
 - ▶ No. 3: What should I do to alleviate the problem?

Question No. 1: If more than 30-35 per cent of cows and heifers are repeating it tells you something is wrong. On the ICBF fertility page this is indicated by non-return-rate (NRR). Assemble the data if you haven't it.

Question No 2: It may indicate one of the following as the cause (carefully go through all nine possible reasons):

- i BCS at calving, too low or too high
- ii BCS loss from calving to mating greater than 0.5
- iii Poor AI technician
- iv Poor storage/management of AI straws
- v Cow stress
- vi Energy deficit
- vii Minerals, particularly, Iodine, Selenium, Copper, Cobalt, Phosphorous
- viii Disease
- ix Poor herd fertility genetics

Question No 3: What should I do!

- ▶ There isn't much you can now do about the first two causes, but make sure you don't let it happen next year,
- ▶ If you are a DIY operator, be honest with yourself and answer ‘are you a good AI-man and careful with straw management?’ The same goes for the AI technician you use – check his record with the AI company.
- ▶ Cow stress occurs with bullying, lack of feed and water.
- ▶ An energy deficit occurs when grass gets tight, very wet or stemmy causing the cow to milk ‘off her back’.
- ▶ With your Vet and/or Adviser, check out possible mineral issues by way of blood sampling, soil, grass and forage sampling.
- ▶ With your Vet check out the diseases that may influence your fertility achievements,
- ▶ Finally, and not last port of call, herd genetics greatly influences conception rate outcomes. The EBI fertility targets are:
 - » Friesian: €110 +
 - » Jersey Cross: €65+
 - » The further away your herd is from these targets the poorer your herd conception rate will be.
- ▶ We are now in the most difficult part of the breeding season:
 - ▶ It is more difficult to identify bulling cows
 - ▶ Bulling activity is now only one-fifth of what it was 4-5 weeks ago.
 - ▶ Fewer cows are bulling, therefore, less bulling activity and as some cows are only mounted 5-6 times (average 10) with each mount only lasting 2-3 seconds, the chances of not seeding these cows bulling now is very high.
- ▶ You must “up” your heat observation efforts:
 - ▶ Tail paint or such aids are now more important than ever and should be topped up every 3-4 days.
 - ▶ A vasectomised bull, if you have one, should now be introduced. He, as well as a stock bull, must have been treated with dihydrostreptomycin and vaccinated for leptospirosis etc. before use.
 - ▶ He will be effective without a chin-ball if he hasn't many cows to keep an eye on.
 - ▶ Many farmers are now using computerised devices during this period to “help out” and they have merit but you must use other supports to confirm accuracy of detection.
 - ▶ Use previous service dates, off ICBF report, to help you

Management Hints

predict when to expect heats.

- ▶ Bull late calvers at 30-40 days after calving with an easy calving, and a minus 7+ days for calving interval.

HOW LONG SHOULD I USE DAIRY AI?

- ▶ Farmers must use 5 straws for every heifer required.
 - ▶ A 100-cow farmer will need 25 heifer calves; therefore, he needs to use 125 Dairy AI straws.
 - ▶ Farmers must keep using AI until that number of straws are used in the season. This includes repeats.
 - ▶ If the farmer intends expanding or has mastitis, lameness or other health issues he must use more AI straws.
- ▶ To bring late calvers and cows being served late choose your dairy AI bull now, with a gestation length of minus (-) 5-10 days, to ensure a shorter gestation period:
 - ▶ A minus 5(-5) days gestation length translates into a 10-day shorter gestation.
 - ▶ This 10-days will give an extra 10 kgs of milk solids next year, worth €20 in profit.
 - ▶ The bull chosen must meet whatever other criteria you have set for the herd.
 - ▶ Most beef stock bulls will delay calving next year – not a good idea!
- ▶ With good service day records for each cow, you can scan cows for pregnancy from 32 days post AI. This will allow you, under good scanning/veterinary supervision to take action if the animal is not pregnant or has a weak pregnancy.

- ▶ While I don't agree with the following advice I must address it: when the correct number of Dairy AI straws have been used introduce the stock-bull.

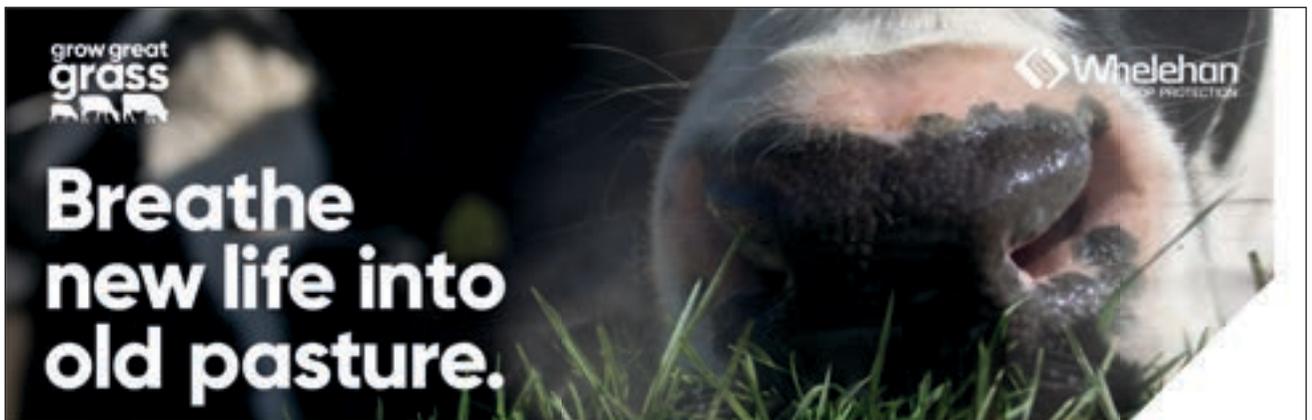
- ▶ Use a short gestation bull, such as Aberdeen Angus, Hereford or Belgian Blue.
- ▶ He will need to have been out at grass for 4-5 weeks.
- ▶ Serve 4 'trial' cows with him in late May/early June, to check his fertility, and if there are more than two repeats get the vet to examine him as he may be "firing blanks".
- ▶ Is he free of Leptospirosis, IBD and other health issues that he can easily transfer to your cows? Talk to your Vet.
- ▶ There is a case for having NO stock bull on the farm as each bull costs €800 – 1200 per year. And he might only serve 25-30 cows – fierce expensive. Good heat detection would be essential, maybe a computerised aid or vasectomised bull would be cheaper with no risk to humans.

WINTER FEED: GREAT CHALLENGE THIS YEAR

Most farmers will struggle to get enough 1st cut silage, because of poor May grass growth.

- ▶ You will know from other years how much silage you are short from 1st cut. Therefore, start the process of rectifying the situation from now – it will allow you to minimise the cost.
- ▶ There may be a case for delaying 1st cut a few days to let it 'bulk-up' while still achieving an DMD of 69-72 per cent

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- most farmers have sown late heading varieties and these will maintain quality even up to 10th June.

- ▶ The basic principle for June is to keep growing as much grass as you possibly can by:
 - ▶ For 2nd cut apply N (80units) and use equivalent of 2 bags 0:7:30 per acre to supply P & K, but more where fertility is low.
 - ▶ Stock the cows and cattle at 3.5 to 3.8 livestock units/ha on the grazing area so that you can close up larger areas for silage cutting. To achieve these grazing SR you must have 76 per cent of your annual N allowance over the whole farm by 15th June.
 - ▶ You should only 'top' pastures as a last resort because it is a method of wasting grass. Something we can't afford this year. If grass is getting strong, take out the surplus as round bales.
- ▶ Kale or rape are options to consider but must be sown now.
- ▶ The feed value of winter forages and feeds will be determined by the price of barley (maybe €200) and soya (maybe €450) and the following, per ton costs may guide you:
 - ▶ Grass silage; (a) 72DMD worth €34; 65DMD worth €28. With this information you can calculate if renting land, 2nd cuts with a yield 6-7 tons of settled silage per acre, is justified.
 - ▶ Barley straw = €95;
 - ▶ Fodder beet = €43,
 - ▶ Maize silage (32 per cent DM and 25 per cent starch) = €55;
 - ▶ Whole crop cereal silage (45%DM and 25% starch) = €73
 - ▶ Autumn grass (18 per cent DM) = €38
- ▶ Some farmers are grossly over-stocked, carrying poor milkers, high SCC/mastitis prone cows and lame cows. Sell off now. Use milk recording data and personal knowledge to weed them out and leave sentiment out of the decision.

GRASS COVER: THE DRIVER

The following are the grass cover targets for various stocking rates in Kgs DM per hectare that drive grass quality and yield during June:

Stocking Rate (cows/ha)	Pre-Grazing Cover (S.R. x 18 x 21+50) *	Average Farm Cover (S.R. x 180) **
3.0	1180	540
3.5	1380	630
3.7	1450	670

*Stocking rate x Daily Allowance x Rotation Length +Residual = Kg DM per hectare.

**Stocking rate x recommended cover per cow = Kg DM per hectare

- ▶ This is basic, fundamental knowledge required to manage grass to best effect. If you don't know that, you are now going to be left behind.
- ▶ If you are under these target covers you will run short of grass and if over these, grass will get too stemmy. Cows will underperform if either of these two situations arise.

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Management Hints

- ▶ The Nitrogen advice is, for all farmers, to apply 28 units/acre (protected Urea) in June with heavily stocked farmers applying it in early June with low stocked farmers applying it in mid-June. But you must work within your nitrate limits. These are monthly recommended amounts.
- ▶ On sulphur deficient farms you will get a response of 10 per cent – 50 per cent more grass by spreading 20 units per acre of sulphur between now and September, if no sulphur has been used yet. That same level of S must be used for 2nd cuts. Because sulphur interferes with copper uptake, don't use it if you don't need it.
- ▶ Fields, after a silage cut, should get 40+ units of Nitrogen for grazing and 2nd cut silage ground 80 units.
- ▶ There may be a case where soil P & K is low that one round of 27:2:5:5 is required to improve grass yield on the grazing area.
- ▶ Slurry, if you don't spread all your slurry on to bare silage ground now, you won't have the chance to spread it all in 'one go' later in the year. Immediately after cutting the silage spread 1500 -2000 gallons of slurry per acre and the balance of N, approx, 70 units/acre, 5-7 days later.

BE CAREFUL TO AVOID SLURRY LOSSES & DEATHS

Agitating slurry is very dangerous. Children and adults must be nowhere near the sheds while it is being agitated, preferably on a windy day.

- ▶ Go about this very important chore in a planned way:
 - ▶ Agitate the tanks 1-2 weeks before cutting the silage.
 - ▶ Have warning signs up in and around sheds during agitation.
 - ▶ Have the contractor booked to spread as the silage is being picked up.
 - ▶ Have warning signs when going on to the public road and be able to clean it if need arises.
- ▶ The spreading rate will be 1,500-2,500 gallons of diluted slurry per acre. Very heavy applications result in run-off or caking on the surface. This will save 8-13 units of Nitrogen per acre.
- ▶ Do not spread within 30-40 yards of wells and open waterways, or when very heavy rain is forecast but light rain increases the utilisation of N. Minimise risk of pollution.
- ▶ Do not spread when wind is blowing towards local householders.
 - ▶ Use trailing shoe or band spreader to reduce ammonia losses.
 - ▶ Turn off the vacuum tanker immediately when tanker is empty.
 - ▶ Where staff are overworked it is a very good idea to get a

contractor to spread it with a trailed and shoe system.

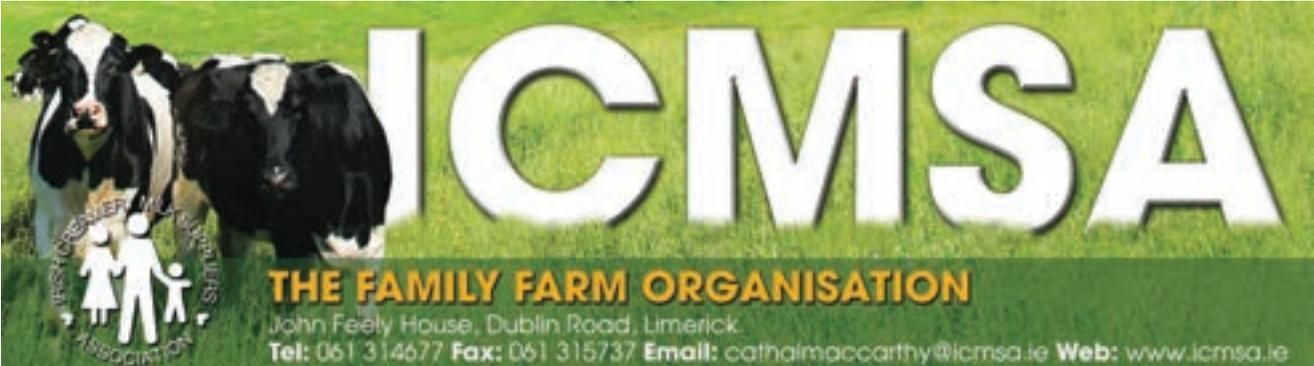
- ▶ Again, be very careful, while agitating.
- ▶ Too many road accidents happen as a result of no warning signs or muck on the road and/or involvement of very young tractor drivers.
 - ▶ Talk about this safety issue in advance.
- ▶ Spread the slurry immediately after the silage is cut.
 - ▶ Nitrogen should be spread 5-7 days later.
 - ▶ You will lose N to the atmosphere if spread near the slurry spreading day.
 - ▶ Anyway, there is no rush as there will be no growth for 7-10 days after a silage cut.
- ▶ Spread lime on bare silage fields ear marked for grazing and other 'bare' grazing fields that need lime.
 - ▶ If spreading lime after slurry, delay 7-8 days.
 - ▶ Generally, all fields need 2 tons/acre of lime every 3 years.

REPLACEMENT HEIFER CARE

The following are 1st June targets:

	% Mature Cow	Holstein Fr	Jersey X
Yearlings (R2's):	63	367	342
Calves (R1's):	23	135	127

- ▶ The cows' mature weight is got by weighing 3rd calvers and older cows in June/July – worth doing NOW. You can also estimate the herds' mature weight by using the Maintenance data on your herds EBI.
- ▶ For instance, if the herds' maintenance is €20 then the herd will average 544 kgs weight per cow. Every €5 difference from this changes the cow's weight by 1kgs less than 5 kgs.
- ▶ A maintenance figure of €10 = 592kg cow.
- ▶ You must weigh replacements regularly to make sure you know what's happening and therefore, deal with underweight animals. This advice is imperative for contract heifer rearer's/farmers with heifers on contract so that no disputes occur later in the year.
- ▶ The summer is when you get 'cheap weight gain in heifers' – don't miss out!
- ▶ Calf stage
 - ▶ Calves must always on the best grass, with residuals eaten off by R2s or cows. As well as getting best grass, there are fewer parasites high up on the grass plant.
 - ▶ Small calves would benefit from milk and/or meals in June.



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- ▶ Big calves, on good grass, require no meals. The conversion rate is 8:1.
 - ▶ Stay on top of parasites such as hoose and stomach worms. Dose for hoose when oldest calf starts to cough and dose for stomach worms, if not on the Ivermectin programmes, with a white/yellow dose in late June and move onto aftergrass.
 - ▶ Heifer stage:
 - ▶ R2s mated after 12 June will calve down after 22 March – it is getting very late to start calving heifers into a herd. If she hasn't 'held' by now there is something wrong with her.
 - ▶ Underweight heifers may need to be separated out and run with calves on best grass or fed 1-2kgs meal separately.
- (24units/acre) and K (140 units/acre) at sowing. Poorer soils require more.
- ▶ Watch out for pests as the crop develops.
 - ▶ There should be a run-back area available to the animals during feeding.
 - ▶ Silage bales should be placed strategically in June/July across the longest headland to minimise winter damage to the soil.
- BRIEF MESSAGES:**
- ▶ Change milk liners now after 2000 milkings. If you have 10 rows being miked twice/day, then each liner has to do 20 milkings per day. Therefore, in that situation the liners need to be changed after 100 days (2000 divide by 20) milkings (3.3 months). If not changed, mastitis and SCC level will increase.

KALE: CHEAPEST WINTER FEED OPTION

- ▶ An 10 ton/ha crop of kale will be the cheapest source of feed next winter:
 - ▶ It is 80 per cent DMD, as good as barley
 - ▶ It and fodder beet will cost less than €1/day to feed a cow next winter.
 - ▶ The expected yield is 8-12 tons DM/ha with early June sowing.
 - ▶ With a 10-ton average crop and allocating 4kg and 7.5 kg respectively to weanlings and cows per day (with another roughage), the crop will feed 40 weanlings or 20 cows for 60 days.
 - ▶ The weanlings and cows will gain 0.6kg and 0.25 kg respectively per day.
 - ▶ Sow in dry fields that need to be reseeded or after 1st Cut silage.
- ▶ Requirements:
 - ▶ Sow in early June because, thereafter 1 ton/ha/week DM is lost.
 - ▶ A fine, firm seed bed is essential.
 - ▶ Seed can be drilled or broadcast (need higher seeding rate) at 4.5 to 5 kg/ha,
 - ▶ Sow kale once per 5 yrs in same field to avoid clubroot.
 - ▶ You need a soil pH of 6.5 to 7.0
 - ▶ Nitrogen: It needs 100kg/ha (80units/acre) split in two applications, the second one at the 2-3 leaf stage.
 - ▶ For a soil index 3, apply P

- ▶ High SCC/mastitis:
 - ▶ If the cow is a repeat offender, get rid of her,
 - ▶ Test the milking machine again and change liners.
 - ▶ You will need to pre and post dip all cows to reduce the spread.
 - ▶ Dip the clusters in parasitic acid after milking an infected cow.
 - ▶ Wear gloves,
 - ▶ Consult your co-op adviser.
- ▶ High TBC:
 - ▶ Is your bulk tank cooling the milk fast enough? Have it checked out.
 - ▶ Is your cleaning procedure correct?
 - ▶ Use your Co-Op Adviser to sort out.
- ▶ Time Off:
 - ▶ It has been a challenging year.
 - ▶ Plan to be only milking 5-6 days per week.
 - ▶ Plan to work less than 60 hours per week.
 - ▶ Try to take a holiday from work.

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