

# Labour Efficiency and Spring Workload

Edition 2

Spring Management Series 2023



## Farmer Focus



John & Sylvia Powell  
Boherboy, Birr, Co. Offaly

### Farm Profile

**Calving start date:** 1st February

**% of herd calved:** 80%

**Spring Labour:** John & Sylvia, relief milkers, relief labour



Sylvia and John currently milk 240 cows in Boherboy, Birr Co, Offaly. Their aim is to make work as easy and labour-efficient as possible for themselves but also for any help they have on farm. They have invested in mechanising many jobs around the yard to help make work as simple as possible.

### Calving

Calving is going well except for a few cases of milk fever. As a result, all 3rd lactation cows+ received a calcium bolus and this has helped prevent any more cases. The remaining cows due to calve received their rotovac vaccine during the week. They are also being watched so that they don't put on too much BCS.

### Grazing

Cows have been out day and night for most of February and are now just out by day. We had 50% of the platform grazed by the start of March which is more than we would have liked but the weather was good.

Cows will only graze by day, and we plan to zero graze the silage ground in. This will clean off the silage before fertilising and keep grass in the diet. Cows started grazing some of the heavy paddocks we have which would be unusual but with the weather so good we cleaned paddocks off.

### Calves

Calves are doing well, we have had no illness. The first born will be moving on to OAD feeding to reduce labour. We have done this for the last few years and have had no problems.



## Farmer Focus (Continued)

We're currently locked up with TB so anything that can reduce labour demand is a help. We have plenty of space as we have invested in the last few years due to the occurrence of TB.

### Contractor use

50% of the farm was covered with slurry in early February and the whole farm received 30 units N the last week of February - done by a contractor. The zero grazing will also be done by a contractor which frees up time for myself and Sylvia, says John. We have a farm map in the parlour which we send on to the contractor. This way he can easily know which fields we're talking about.



## Look after yourself

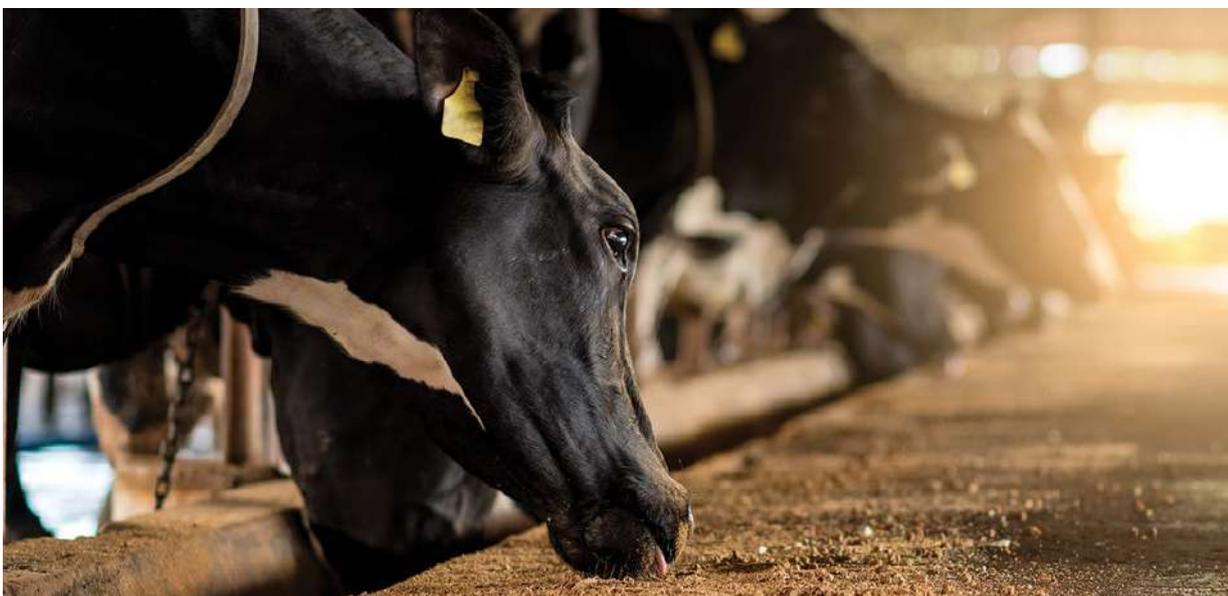
### Reduce your milking interval

Springtime is the best time of year to adjust your milking start times. Milking interval ultimately dictates your finishing times, labour efficiency and total hours worked on the farm.



Many of the best Lakeland Dairies herds are operating a 16-8hr or a 15-9hr milking interval. Milking should take place between 3-4 pm in the afternoon. **Reducing your milking interval should be practiced this spring.** Later milking times of 5pm or after, often lead to poor use of time prior to starting milking.

Unessential jobs are carried out while waiting to milk. A 16-8hr milking interval has shown no negative effects on SCC or milk yield, which is backed up by Teagasc research and Lakeland Dairies top farmers.



"Main farming tasks are completed at 6pm or before."



**Other benefits include:**

1. Better Lifestyle: Main farming tasks are completed at 6pm or before.
2. Happier staff: The retention of staff is much easier with a fixed early milking time.
3. Succession: Dairy farming is portrayed as a positive career choice for the next generation.
4. Milking interval describes only 1% of yield variation but 25% of work efficiency.

### Calf Care

Calf husbandry takes up 25% of the labour requirement on dairy farms in spring. This can vary from farm to farm depending on facilities and calf rearing practices. The most efficient farms have simple systems and methods to reduce labour input in the calf shed. These are outlined below:

Table 1 Teagasc

Effect of calving rate and age at sale on peak calf numbers for a 100 cow herd			
6 week calving rate	Age at sale of beef calves	Peak Calves	Space required (m <sup>2</sup> )
70%	2 weeks	47	80m <sup>2</sup>
70%	4-5 weeks	70	119m <sup>2</sup>
85%	2 weeks	50	85m <sup>2</sup>
85%	6 weeks	85	145m <sup>2</sup>

**1. Milk transport and preparation**

Suitable ways to move milk around the farm, e.g. using milk karts, play an important part in reducing manual strain. Time efficient farmers have workstations. These areas contain all the essentials to mix milk replacer, tagging equipment etc.

**2. Once-a-day milk feeding**

OAD feeding is a practice that can greatly reduce the labour required during the rearing period. Research conducted by Teagasc has shown no difference in the level of performance achieved by calves on OAD or TAD (twice a day) feeding. **It is important to wait until 28 days to commence OAD milk feeding.**

### Best practice for once-a-day milk feeding

For calves transitioning to OAD feeding, they must be provided with ad-lib access to concentrates, long fibre, and always have access to fresh clean water.

- ▶ Ensure all calves drink their daily allowance of milk.
- ▶ Feed calves at the same time with milk replacer each day.
- ▶ It's preferable to feed milk in the morning, as this will reduce disturbance and allow calves to settle down to concentrate feeding.
- ▶ Concentrates should also be fed at a time when milk is not being fed. This ensures compliance with EU legislation on twice daily feeding.
- ▶ Check calves twice daily to detect any potential problems such as scour, etc.
- ▶ Being consistent on feeding time, temperature of the milk fed, concentration and volume offered, as well as hygiene, is of the utmost importance.

### Key information about once-a-day milk feeding

- ▶ As calves are dependent on a mostly milk diet for the first four weeks of life, OAD feeding should not start before this point.
- ▶ Only healthy calves should be transitioned to OAD feeding.
- ▶ Calves are not under-fed when an OAD feeding protocol is correctly implemented; rather they receive their daily allocation of milk powder in one feed rather than two.
- ▶ For OAD systems, the mixing rate may be gradually increased to 180g of powder to 820ml of water. At a feeding rate of 4.25-4.5L/day, this gives the mixed milk a solids content of 18%. It will take a high-quality milk replacer to achieve this mixing rate.



## Purchasing time with your local contractor

**Contractors are an essential member of all successful farming operations.**

They offer a range of services from forage harvesting and slurry spreading to bulk fertiliser spreading and land work. In a busy spring it makes sense to offload some time-consuming work, so you can concentrate on animal husbandry and getting cows to grass.

### Time consuming jobs, that are easily delegated to a contractor

- ▶ Slurry: Mixing and spreading slurry on the milking platform and silage ground.
- ▶ Fertiliser: Application of first round of urea and silage ground fertiliser.
- ▶ Forage transportation: Drawing home silage bales or pit silage from the out-farm.

### Benefits of using Agri contractors

- ▶ Nitrogen efficiency - contractors help farmers get more slurry out in spring and with the use of Low Emission Slurry Spreading methods (LESS), getting more nitrogen from the slurry.
- ▶ Avoids the need to hire extra staff and investing in expensive machinery.
- ▶ Increased capacity ensures good value for money.
- ▶ Tax-deductible expense.

### How to build up a good relationship with your local contractor

1. Notice: Allows the contractor to be efficient in his operation. Getting the job completed at the best time for farmer and contractor.
2. Farm maps: Simple farm maps will help give clear instructions and help communication.
3. Consistency of work and prompt payment will ensure a trustworthy service.



## Joint Development Programme

Lakeland Dairies/Teagasc Joint Development Programme has produced this Spring Management Series. Our advisors are currently available by phone to discuss all farm related matters.

- ▶ Susan Casey 087 099 5359
- ▶ Owen McPartland 087 330 2254
- ▶ Michael Monahan 087 188 3803

# Adding Value this Breeding Season



## Evening Workshops



**The purpose of any breeding programme is to produce a cow that will maximise profitability for a farmer. It has been consistently shown that improving the cow's genetic merit, in addition to nutrition, health and proper management, can play a vital role in improving productivity.**

With this in mind the Lakeland Dairies/Teagasc joint programme is hosting two evening workshops with the following topics to be covered on each night:

- ▶ The current state of play across Lakeland Dairies herds - Owen McPartland Teagasc/Joint Programme
- ▶ Breeding a cow suitable for all systems - Joe Patton Head of Dairy Knowledge Transfer Teagasc
- ▶ Your breeding plan - what to consider? Susan Casey/Michael Monahan Lakeland Dairies Joint programme
  - *Sire selection - what to look out for?*
  - *Cow Selection - picking the cows to get dairy AI.*
  - *What role has sexed semen to play in your breeding plan?*
  - *Improving the quality of your beef calves.*

Each event will start at **7:30 pm**

**20th March – Feerick's Hotel, Rathowen, Co. Westmeath**

**21st March – Errigal Hotel, Cootehill, Co. Cavan**

**Speak to one of the Joint Programme Advisors to discuss your own independent breeding plan.**

- ▶ Susan Casey 087 099 5359
- ▶ Owen McPartland 087 330 2254
- ▶ Michael Monahan 087 188 3803