

Labour Efficiency and Spring Workload

Edition 3

Spring Management Series 2023



Farmer Focus



John & Sylvia Powell
Boherboy, Birr, Co. Offaly

Farm Profile

Calving start date: 1st February

% of herd calved: 97%

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 as labour efficient as possible – both for themselves and 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 nearly complete, there are 7 cows left to calve and they should be done in the next week or two. All the remaining cows are in calf to angus.

Grazing

Cows have been out by day only due to the slow growth. We started the second rotation this week. In the past week we have only grown 21 kg/dm/day which is well below our demand. Cows also get grass inside as we zero graze the silage ground. We would like to have more of that zero grazed by now to close for silage but due to the weather this has been delayed. It should be complete by the end of the week. Slurry has been applied where possible after zero grazing. The grazing ground has got two applications of urea so far this year with 60 units put out.

Calves

Calves are doing well, we have had to keep all our calves due to TB but we have gone clear in the last few weeks. We have the room and facilities, so we may keep calves on. The older calves are all on OAD so this frees up the workload in the afternoon. The calves were dehorned and vaccinated during the week.



Farmer Focus (Continued)

Breeding

We have a breeding plan complete for the herd; this is done early in the spring in order to guarantee bulls. We have the collars on this spring too which should help with heat detection. We only have them on since February so are still getting used to them.

We also have to complete our milk recording. This is usually complete by now, but we're waiting for a date. This recording helps us to catch any high SCC cows early in the year.

We also plan to take a weekend away before the start of breeding. We book time away in advance to ensure we get away, as it's important to take a break too.



Reviewing the Spring Workload

Spring calving is almost complete on most Lakeland Dairies farms.

It's the best time to review how your spring calving season has gone, when it's fresh in your mind. The focus on all farms should be to maximise work efficiencies and minimise time worked while maintaining high standards. Think about your farm. What difficulties have you encountered this spring? How much time or performance is it costing? How will you prevent it happening next year?

Make a list of these difficulties and plan for the next 12 months to avoid the same problems next Spring. Contact the Joint Programme Team with any queries.



Outdoor Calf Rearing

Rearing calves is a time-consuming practice on all farms. Time and accommodation pressures make many farmers look at outdoor rearing of older calves.

Teagasc research with rearing calves outdoors in such shelters, from 4 weeks of age, found no difference in calf daily liveweight gain compared to calves reared indoors. Indeed, the liveweight gain of calves reared in overcrowded houses would be substantially less particularly if an outbreak of disease occurred.

However, some form of shelter must be provided. One of the biggest factors affecting the success of outdoor rearing is the weather at turnout. Check the forecast and make sure that calves are turned out when a few dry days are forecast. It doesn't matter if it is cold; it just needs to be dry. Make sure strong healthy calves are turned out and if some calves are not thriving there is no problem returning them inside.

As the spring goes on the weather becomes more settled for a more prolonged period. Younger calves can be reared outdoors from 2 weeks of age **but only if** there is enough shelter provided.



Key tips to successful outdoor rearing

1. Only turnout healthy thriving calves.
2. Pick a suitable field and shelter must be provided.
3. A form of roughage must be provided. E.g. Bale of straw left in the field.
4. Only turn out calves if good weather forecasted.
5. Monitor calves closely. Return any vulnerable calves to the shed.

Labour saving ideas around the breeding season

Breeding season is just around the corner and, with successful breeding seasons underpinning the financial stability of the farm for the years ahead, spending the next couple of weeks preparing makes sense.

1. Sire Advice & Selection

Picking the correct team of bulls is an important decision for your future herd. It's important to make time to have a conversation with likeminded people about the breeding focus on your farm, such as your Teagasc advisor. Once the sires have been selected use Sire Advice to mate the most suitable sire to the cows in your herd. This will save time and decision making on the day of AI.

2. AI Technician & Once-a-Day AI

Many larger herds are off-loading work and moving back to AI technicians. If labour availability is scarce around breeding season, leaving AI to the technician could save many hours during the first three weeks of the breeding season and potentially improve conception rates. Once-a-day AI is also beneficial in streamlining workload. Only one milking is disrupted by drafting cows for AI. A second person milking - at the milking where the cows are drafted - is beneficial.

3. Heat Detection Aids

Heat detection aids or auto-detection methods minimise observation time for detecting cows in heat. Tail paint is the most widely and simplest used heat detection aid for cows. Teaser bulls are useful after the first three weeks of the breeding season. Whatever heat detection aid(s) are used it will have positive effects on the submission rates in your herd with a reduced reliance on visual only detection.

Sire Advice is a mating management tool available through ICBF.

To learn more about sire advice visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEE6BS8iBcA>



For independent Sire advice contact a member of our Lakeland/Teagasc JP Team.

4. Heifer Synchronisation

Synchronisation is a useful management tool to maximise the number of heifers that become pregnant as quickly as possible after mating start date. Its advantage is that all the heifers are inseminated with only 4 contacts with the entire bunch of heifers. Speak to your vet about a suitable action plan for your heifers. Synchronisation protocols work very well for heifers that have started cycling but will not work in non-cycling heifers. To reduce work with heifer breeding, organise your grazing so that the heifers can be beside a handling unit for the first three weeks of breeding. This will reduce the time needed to bring in heifers daily.



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