

# Labour Efficiency and Spring Workload

Edition 3

Spring Management Series 2024



## Farmer Focus



**Owen Brodie**  
**Ryefield House, Virginia, Co. Cavan**

### Farm Profile

**Calving start date:** 5th February 2024

**% of herd calved:** 94%

**Spring Labour:** Owen, one full time worker, one student from Ballyhaise, Owen's wife Rose Mary and other family members at weekends and holidays.



*Martin Ward (right) collecting milk from Owen's farm.*

Owen currently milks around 200 cows in Virginia Co. Cavan. His aim is to run the farm efficiently, making life as simple as possible not only for himself but also his staff. Owen is continuously making improvements on the farm and investing modern equipment to make the workload simpler.

### Calving

Calving is nearly complete on the farm. There are roughly 12 cows remaining and these should be calved in the next week or so. All the remaining cows are in calf to Hereford bulls.

### Calves

The calves are currently doing well. There has been no additional case of pneumonia on the farm as of late. There has been an odd case of nutritional scour. The older calves which Owen has chosen to sell have been sold privately and through the mart. The selling of calves has cut down on labour significantly. Most calves left are now on the automatic drinkers.





## Farmer Focus (Continued)

### Grazing and Contractor use

Last week Owen got 90,000gls of slurry out. His contractor spread it at a rate of 3,000gls per acre. The slurry was spread on ground that was grazed during the first rotation.

Owen's Contractor uses modern technology such as GPS tracking systems. Above is a map that shows where slurry was spread on the grazing platform.

Cows are still only out by day due to the heavy rain fall. Owen hopes to start the second rotation on the 10th of April which he is on track to achieve. Currently the weather is having a large impact on labour demands at the farm.



### Breeding

The breeding plan is now complete to ensure the AI operative has time to acquire the straws Owen wants. The first day of breeding will commence on the 7th May. There are collars on all the cows which is an excellent way to detect heats. The AI operative will be inseminating cows in the morning and evening. The heifers will be synchronised and AI. The heifers are given sexed semen straws.



## 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.

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