

# Labour Efficiency and Spring Workload

Edition 2

Spring Management Series 2024



## Farmer Focus



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

### Farm Profile

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

**% of herd calved:** 70%

**Spring Labour:** Owen, one full time worker, one student from Ballyhaise and family members at weekends and holidays.



### Calving

Calving is going well apart from the rare case of milk fever. Remaining cows to calve are still being regularly checked throughout the day. They are regularly monitored to ensure the BCS is correct, and they are not overweight. Cows that are too heavy are put on a diet of silage and straw.

### Calves

The calves are currently doing well. There has been an odd case of pneumonia on the farm as of late. Most cases of pneumonia while in the subclinical stage were picked up by the automatic calf feeders. This reduces impact on the calf's health but also reduces labour in treating the sick calf.

### Milking

Milking twice a day has commenced. Fresh cows and cows with mastitis are milked at the end of milking. Fresh cows are CMT before being put into the bulk tank. As the cows have settled into the routine of milking there is now only one person in the Parlor at milking time. This has helped reduce labour. One worker comes in for the morning milking and goes home around four thirty, while the second milker comes in at eight and does the evening milking finishing around six. The two workers alternate Sundays.

### Contractor use

As the ground conditions are poor Owen has not called in the contractors yet. He hopes to do so in the coming weeks to get fertilizer out. He aims to spread fertilizer on paddocks that are most in need with a quad.



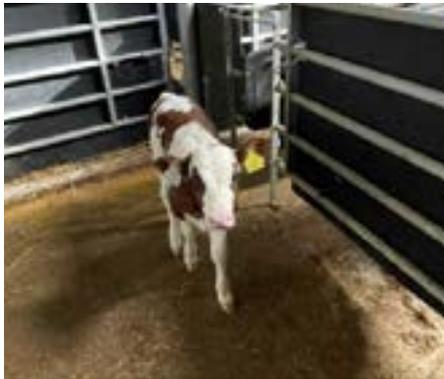
## Farmer Focus (Continued)

### Grazing and feed

Cows are out in the morning until milking time at three. They are then let back out from five till eight. The weather can dictate the length of time they are out. The daytime paddocks have an average cover of 1600/1700kg DM/ha. The nighttime paddocks have an average cover of 1300kg DM/ha. The grazing platform is comprised of 58ha.

Owens farm is 2.5km long. He has invested heavily in the past number of years in improving roadways. The roadways now have a surface of Astro turf which has led to improved cow flow and a drop in lameness.

The farm map is a useful tool on the farm. Owen and his staff can see exactly what paddocks the cows are going to and lessen the likelihood of them going to the wrong place.





## Look after yourself

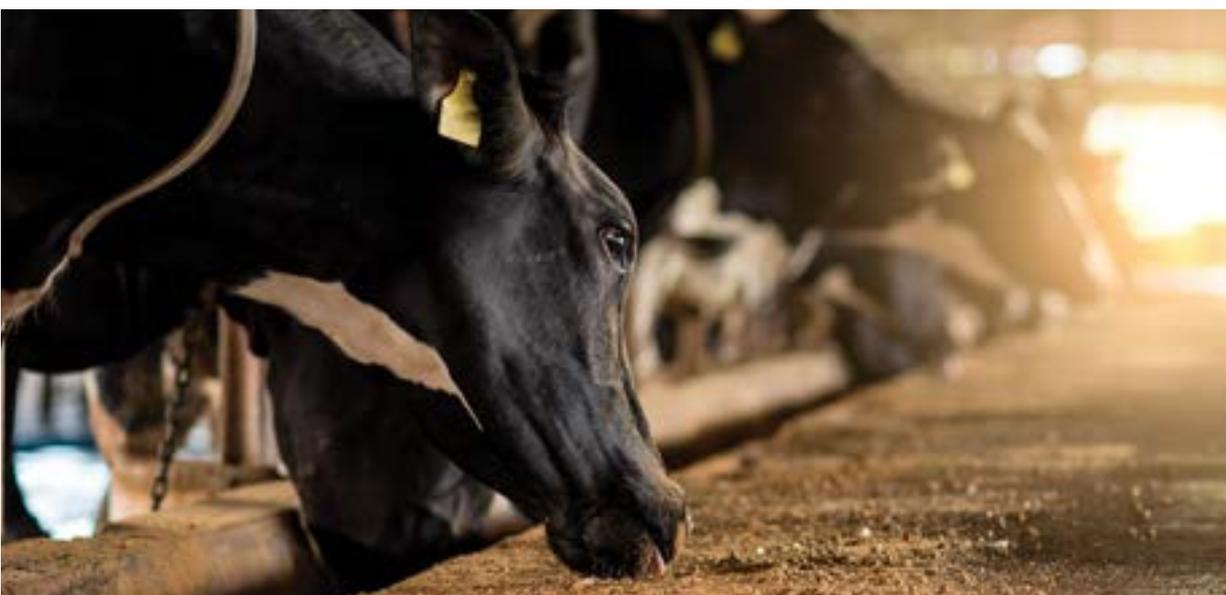
### Reduce your milking interval

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 upmost 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.

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