

Messages:

- ▶ Define the issues you have to address in April.
- ▶ Make a cow/heifer breeding plan for 2019
- ▶ Put the time and organisation into identifying cows on heat.
- ▶ Match your best cows to best AI bulls on Sire Advice.
- ▶ Heifers MUST be synchronised.
- ▶ Poor EBI herds should Contract Mate Heifer calves for 2020.
- ▶ Put yourself in control: Do a grassland management plan now.
- ▶ Actively manage the 2nd grazing rotation, because “grass grows grass”.
- ▶ April is by far the best month to reseed – use best varieties on PPI list.

By Matt Ryan

DEFINING THE PROBLEMS/ISSUES FOR APRIL

- ▶ In 2018, over 49 per cent of all replacements entering the dairy herd were by stock bulls. Crazy! Why?
 - These cows will be €70-100 per cow less profitable per year than the average AI bred cow.
- ▶ The average national EBI was €87, while the Top 10 per cent of farmers was €125. Farmers using AI, used bulls with an average EBI of €225, whereas, Teagasc advised using €280. It isn't as if the bulls weren't there because the Top 10 per cent of farmers used bulls with EBI's of €279.
- ▶ In the emissions debate we are saying that because of EBI we have an efficient cow. If we don't do something very positive soon on EBI this argument “won't hold water”.
- ▶ In 2018 there was 3-8 c/l difference in milk price between some suppliers. Why?
 - Because of the difference of % F & P between herds.
- ▶ In 2018 the 6-week calving rate was 63 per cent - target is 90 per cent for one of the two key KPIs of dairy farming. A loss of €170 million to the industry per year.
 - Advisory agencies and Co-Ops must make a concerted effort to address this loss. Each dairy farmers must address the personal loss.
- ▶ The 2018 data also shows that only 64 per cent of replacements entered the dairy herd at 22-26 months of age. This is the most efficient/beneficial age to maximise life-time yield. Over 99 per cent of the top farmers bring them in at 1 year and 11 months old. Indicates:
 - Poor calf rearing/management with no commitment to meeting heifer targets throughout the year.
- ▶ Grass will be tight in April, resulting in more meal being fed and very little ground being closed up for 1st silage until May. Solution -
 - Make a grassland management plan for 2019.
 - Make a grass feed budget for April.

COW/HEIFER BREEDING PLAN:

- ▶ Decide on your MSD (mating start date) based on your targeted median calving date for 2020 and the number of days from start of calving to median calving date in 2020.
- ▶ Based on Research the following mean calving dates are advised:
 - South (dry land): 14th February (most cows incalf by 7th May)
 - North (or wet land): 24th February (most cows incalf by 18th May)
- ▶ The target number of days from start of calving to median calving date is 15-20 days:
 - The median calving date is that day when 50 per cent (half) of the cows have calved,
 - Look up your own on the ICBF site for your herd for 2019.
 - Then, subtract your days from the target median calving date in 2020, to help you decide on the MSD
- ▶ A farmer targeting a median calving date of 20th Feb 2017 should follow this plan:
 - 20 April (-10days); Tail paint all cows red and record heats
 - 23 April (-6 days): MSD for heifers Tail paint and serve for next 6 days.
 - 29 April (-2 days): PG all heifers not served. Bull as they show heat.
 - 30 April (-1day): New paint colour on all cows that have shown heat.
 - 1 May (0 day): Mating Start Day for cows.
 - 11 May (+11 days): Vet examines all non-cycling cows (Red Paint),
 - 4 June: Scan all cows that have been served 28 days or greater,
 - 11 June: Scan all cows that have been served 28 days or greater,
 - 18 June: Scan all cows that have been served 28 days or greater,
 - 10 June: Introduce beef stock or preferably, continue AI with beef bull
 - 22 June: Finish serving cows.
- ▶ This plan will help you achieve the three-week 90 per cent submission target and the 90 per cent six-week calving target next spring.
- ▶ To deliver compact calving and avoid losing a missed heat (cost €70-€100) you should identify non-cycling cows as early in breeding season as possible.
 - Cows with difficult calvings, uterine discharges, cows with twins, or other problems will be slow to go in calf and will need to be examined, but only after they have been given sufficient time to “heal”.
 - Some farmers give PG or a wash out to these or late calvers to get them cycling.
- ▶ That's why I suggest 20th April tail paint (red paint) all calved cows; only 10 days before Mating Start Date (MSD) and getting the Vet to examine non-cycling cows (have red pain) on 11th May (11 days into breeding season);
 - Problem cows have 11 days longer to “heal”,
 - The farmer has 11 days less heat detection -

Management Hints

- farmer can now do it better as he not tired.
- And it still allows these cows be submitted for service during the crucial 3-week submission target (90 per cent)
- ▶ If you have a good scanner that can identify pregnancy at 28 days, then, you should scan as suggested above, 35 days after MSD. You now will know which cows are pregnant/weak pregnancies and you can do something about it.
 - Farmers with automatic identification can easy draft out the appropriate cows one day per week for three consecutive weeks.
 - Without such "luxury" you can identify them by putting a red/green/blue stripe across the cow's shoulder for each of the first three weeks of breeding.

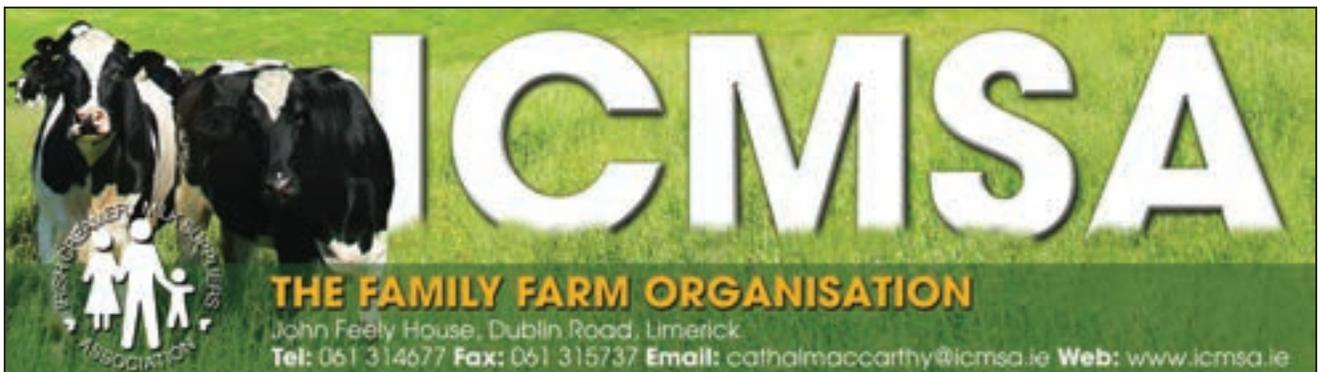
IDENTIFYING COWS ON HEAT IS NOT EASY!

- ▶ This is a fact because:
 - Each standing mount only lasts 2-3 seconds.
 - The average number of mounts by Holstein-Friesians and heifers is 11.
 - Bulling lasts 3-30 hours, averaging 11 hours.
 - So, you only have a window of 25-40 seconds to see some cows bulling.
- ▶ If you miss her, you have lost €70-€100.
 - You must use heat detection aids.
 - Only 59 per cent of farmers use them which show an amazing lack of commitment to making money.
- ▶ What heat detection aids are available?
 - Tail paint with non-drip household emulsion at a cost of 20-25 cents per cow for the season.
 - Specialised tail paints with brush on bottle costing €1 per cow for the season.
 - Aerosol sprays, costing 30-80 cents per cow.
 - Kamars, costing €1.50-€1.80 each.
 - Paint sticks, costing 15 cents per cow or so every time it is put on.
 - 'Scratch cards'.
 - Computerised aids, expensive, but, have improved greatly over the last few years
 - Vasectomise bull, but do not use him until 5-6 weeks into the breeding season as he will be 'murdered'. You still have time to get the vet to 'fix up' an uncastrated yearling. They are worth anything late in the season.
- ▶ To convince you on the paint, the following research data is worth remembering:

- If 90 per cent - 100 per cent of the paint is removed, then there is a 95 per cent chance the cow is bulling.
- Even if 50 per cent of the paint is removed there is a 70 per cent chance she is bulling.
- So, you should bull cows when paint is gone.
- ▶ To avoid confusion it is essential to put on the paint correctly:
 - A 9-inch long by 2-inch wide strip from the top of tail head forward.
 - If it is wider or longer than this you will be confused if some paint removed.
 - Come down a bit the tail head for heifers but definitely not for cows.

USE ICBF SIRE ADVICE TO SELECT 2019 AI BULLS:

- ▶ Use ICBF sire advice to choose your AI bulls from the active bull list.
- ▶ I suggest you identify the bulls you wish to use or let Sire Advice pick them off the Active Bull list or use the AI companies' package (may not give you the best available bulls).
 - Manually choose the bulls you require and match them up with your very best cows, or with cows for Jerseys; any poor cow should be matched with an easy calving beef bull and any cow identified for culling (now a good time to decide) should not be served.
- ▶ I suggest you pick from the following high EBI Bulls so as to improve fertility and % F & P:
 - Friesian for cows; FR4513, FR4337, FR2460, FR4560, FR4439, FR4510, FR4532, FR2424, FR4673, FR4776
 - Friesian for Heifers; FR4560, FR4439, FR4532, FR2424, FR4673, FR4776, FHS, OZG
 - Jerseys: JE4289, JE2438, JE4827, OKT.
- ▶ Cross breeding has merit. Consider it very seriously if:
 - You have an infertile herd.
 - You have wet land and you want a small efficient cow.
 - You have a large herd with the possibility of lots of walking.
 - These bulls would not want to be greater than €60-80 less than a B&W bull on fertility.
- ▶ Use a stock bull if you wish to lose €80-€100 per year for every cow in your herd by not using AI.
 - You also run the risk of injury.
 - Beef stock bulls (AA or Hereford) should be



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considered.

- ▶ Because the price of quality breeding stock is too low, I don't see any economic merit on "non-expanding" farmers AI'ing for longer than 4-6 weeks.
 - Order 5 AI straws for every replacement heifer you require; it should not be more than 25 per 100 cows.
 - This is the most important two hours you will spend this April.

COMPACT HEIFERS BREEDING:

- ▶ This is essential if you want compact calving next year,
 - You must calve the heifers one week before the cow herd:
 - Allows heifers settle-in in the milking parlour.
 - Physiologically, heifer's 2nd lactation calving date is 7 days later than their 1st lactation calving date.
- ▶ This can be organised by synchronizing heifers as follows:
 - Day 1: Tail Paint (Kaymars, scratch cards or crayons are best) all heifers
 - Day 1-6: Bull heifers seen on heat.
 - Day 7: Inject non-bullied heifers with 2cc Prostaglandin.
 - Day 8-11: Most heifers will come bulling and should be served.
 - Day 12 -18 Put on heat identification on all heifers,
 - Day 19 - 24 Heifers will repeat, so AI on paint removal.
- ▶ This works really well if heifers are at target weights.
- ▶ There are other synchronisation programmes, such as 11-day PG/Fixed time AI and 8day CIDR/Fixed time AI that work well
- ▶ Any dairy farmer who doesn't synchronise heifers is ignoring research to his own detriment.

CONTRACT MATE FOR REPLACEMENTS:

- ▶ Do you have cows with an EBI of €140+ and able to produce milk averaging 5 per cent Fat and 3.9 per cent Protein? I suspect not; but how can you get there as fast?
 - There are farmers in Ireland nearly achieving these figures.
 - The national average is close to 4.09 per cent and 3.45 per cent fat and protein respectively.
 - It would take 10-15 years to get from the average to the targets I have mentioned.
- ▶ Why get there as soon as possible?
 - Milk price volatility is here to stay and there will be more frequent low milk price years than we are used to.
 - For a 5500 litre cows with 4.09 per cent F and 3.45 per cent P her profit would be increased by €33 per cow if she had 5.0 per cent F and 3.9 per cent P from the national average constituents.
- ▶ Because these top farmers with excellent quality cows don't get paid adequately for this type of stock when selling as incalf heifers or whenever, they are now breeding dairy AI for 4-6 weeks and then using beef AI/stock bulls to 'clean-up'. Who could blame them when beef calves are and will make such good money!
- ▶ Therefore, what I am suggesting is that farmers with

"low quality" cows, as defined above, should enter a contract with farmers with "high quality cows" to buy their AI bred dairy calves in 2020 at an agreed price now, say €300 -450 each.

- This will encourage the farmer with high quality stock to AI more of his cows with dairy AI and less beef AI. And you can AI all your cows to beef AI, getting very high prices for your calves.
- ▶ Really, really worth thinking about by farmers on both sides of the possible contract!
 - Advisers and Co-op personnel must encourage this practice. It is being in operation for a few years.

DO A GRASSLAND MGT PLAN?

- ▶ This is an essential exercise, so as:
 - Not to be overstocked for the year,
 - To have enough winter feed for the stock you intend to feed next winter,
 - And have enough grazing ground for your present stock in April and May.
 - It will also "cajole" you into having a large 1st cut of silage.
- ▶ This is one major way to save on contractor and silage feed costs per cow.
 - 1st cuts yield 10-12 tons per acre compared with 5-7 tons for 2nd cuts.
 - Quality is 4-6 per cent units better.
 - If little or no 2nd cut is taken more land is available for summer grazing, a saving on Nitrogen.
 - Pit 2nd cut silage is 25 per cent - 40 per cent more expensive than 1st cut.
- ▶ The way to maximise 1st cut is to keep cows, cattle and calves at high stocking rates as follows, on the grazing area during April-May:

	100 Cows on	30 (330 Kg) yearlings on
Very high stocking	21ha (4.8cows/ha)	4 ha (2500kg/ha)
High stocking	22ha (4.5cows/ha)	4.5 ha (2200 kg/ha)
Medium stocking	25ha (4.0 cows/ha)	5.5 ha (1800 kg/ha)

- ▶ Calves can be stocked at 23 per ha during April/May.
- ▶ With this info you should subtract the grazing area required (for cows, calves and replacements), as calculated above, from the total farm hectares to give you the area that can comfortably cut for 1st cut.
 - This exercise will alert you to the fact that you may be overstocked to provide enough winter feed and may need to rent silage ground, buy "pit silage" or sell off stock.
- ▶ To achieve these stocking rates, use the Nitrogen levels recommended.
 - You will need very high growth rates to sustain the very high stoking rates without some meal (1-2kgs)
- ▶ Amazingly, this planning exercise is done by very few farmers - a fundamental mistake!
 - Make 70-73 per cent of your silage requirements from 1st cut, therefore, close 40-45% of your farm for 1st cut silage from mid-April.

- Apply approx.. 100 units of N, discounting for some residual N, with appropriate P and K

ACTIVELY MANAGE 2ND ROTATION:

- ▶ After the spring we have had most farmers should finish the first rotation between 1st and 12th April (wet land).
- ▶ On many farms covers are low, approximately 1,000 Kgs DM, on the early paddocks of the second rotation because;
 - Poor growth rates or not grazed early enough and/or many paddocks suffered some soil compaction/poaching damage
 - Too much ground grazed after 10th March.
- ▶ This will result in farmers grazing the second rotation too fast due to low covers.
- ▶ The first paddocks of the second rotation should not be grazed in the third rotation until after 25th April:
 - They need 25 to 30 days to regrow because growth rates in April will average to 40-50 Kgs DM per day.
 - Therefore, do not let this rotation become too short.
- ▶ To provide quality grass and be able to graze out paddocks correctly:
 - It is essential to go into grass covers of 1,300-1,500 Kgs DM per hectare.
 - However, the pre-grazing covers (PGC) for anyone on 4.7 cows/ha should be 1700kgs/ha – that from 20th April on.
 - Very low stocked farms should go into lower

covers.

- ▶ Poached or damaged paddocks; make absolutely certain to graze on a dry day.
- ▶ Under grazed paddocks on 1st rotation should be grazed out tight this time to encourage tillering and set them up for the summer.
- ▶ You are advised to graze out to 4cm or less at this time
 - Every 1 cm post grazing grass left after grazing represents 250 Kgs DM/ha grass, which will rot.
 - If you leave 200 Kgs of grass DM/ha (many farmers leaving a lot more) in the paddock after the cows have grazed, that is the same as throwing 200 Kgs meal (= €55) down the drain because that grass will have rotted away by next grazing.
 - If you leave 1cm too much after each grazing, that comes to 2 ton DM/ha lost during the year.
- ▶ Over 110 units/acre of N must have been applied to every acre on the farm by early April.
 - Therefore, apply 40 units N/acre in early April. It required because a lot of grass grew this spring using up a lot of N and we will run into grass shortage because of low levels on N available and poor tillering
 - Urea is the cheapest source but some farmers have a confused ignorance that CAN is better-not so!
- ▶ Use Nitrogen to match your stocking rate during April/May as follows:

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Stocking Rate May/June (L.U./ha)	N(Urea) Units/Acre	
	Apr	May
3.75 or less	23	23
3.75 - 4.0	30	28
4.0 +	40	40

- ▶ We should use Sulphur with the Nitrogen on Sulphur deficient soils;
 - Use 5-20 units per acre.
 - Generally light sandy soil.
- ▶ It is very unlikely that any ground will be closed up for silage before 15th April on heavily stocked farms. Therefore, maintain an average farm cover (AFC) of over 700 kgs/ha by feeding meals and grazing potential silage ground twice.

APRIL IS BEST MONTH TO RESEED:

- ▶ Very little reseeded was done in 2018 so we should do it, as the return on investment is 58 per cent.
- ▶ The best time to reseed is April-May because:
 - The perennial ryegrasses can compete better with weed grass.
 - They can be grazed several times during 2019 to 'thicken' the pasture.
 - There will be no loss in yield from that field in the year of sowing because it will be able to be grazed 42 days after sowing with better yield for the remainder of the year.
 - Moorepark has shown that pastures with less than 60 per cent perennial ryegrass should be reseeded.

- ▶ Identify fields with low perennial content or that have been poached:
 - Either plough up or use the one/two pass system to prepare the seedbed.
 - Spray with Roundup fields that are to be cut for baled silage (7-10 days before cutting or grazing).
 - They must be limed (1-2 ton/acre), generally whether they need it or not (to break down the sod).
 - Make sure to roll before seeding.
 - Use 3 bags 18:6:12 per acre.
- ▶ The best varieties (PPI) are: Abergain (T), Aberplentiful (T), Aberclyde (T), Abermagic (D), Nifty (D), Fintona (T), Aberchoice (D).
 - Diploids (D) give better ground cover, while tetraploids (T) are generally more palatable.

BITS AND PIECES

- ▶ Continue to take precautions against grass tetany.
- ▶ Let calves out to grass immediately because calf sheds, because of the mild winter, are rife with pneumonia and scour bugs.
- ▶ Weigh bulling heifers to see how much weight they have to increase by to achieve 320kgs by mating date.
 - If you have animals on contract rearing you must get present weights and you must insist on 50 per cent of heifers be calved 14 days after the start of calving and that 95 per cent of them are calved. A contract that doesn't have this included is no use to the owner of the heifers.
- ▶ No injections to cows or heifers in April.

