

Messages:

- ▶ Examine your ICBF calving report for 2019, make a plan and act.
- ▶ Examine your ICBF fertility report for 2019, make a plan and act.
- ▶ Address preventive care now!
- ▶ Are thin cows still thin?
- ▶ Take steps to ensure Replacement heifer's targets will be achieved.
- ▶ AS the main feed now is silage, good pit care ensures intakes are maximised.
- ▶ Take steps NOW to have (a) calf contract rearer lined up, (b) male calf purchaser lined up, (c) someone to contract mate with next year.

Calving data targets for 2019?

All the technical efficiencies you need to know about the management of your cows is available on Herd Plus on the ICBF site.

Let's examine the ICBF data available to you. See Table 1. If you achieve these technical efficiency targets and others in grassland you will be farming at optimum levels.

Table 1: Calving Technical Efficiencies and Targets for 2019. (Source ICBF calving report)

Technical Efficiency	National Av Farm	Target	Your Figure
Start of Calving:			
Cows	??	1 Feb	-----
Heifers	??	7days earlier	-----
Median Calving Date	6 Mar	15- 25 Feb*	-----
Calving Period	12-14 weeks	10weeks	-----
Av Age at Calving:			
Cows	5yr 6m	6yrs 6m	-----
Heifers'	1yr 11 m	1 yr 11m	-----
Av Lactation Age at slaughter	4.4	5.5	-----
Calving Interval (Days) (*)	390	365	-----
6-Week calving Rate (%) (*)	65	90	-----
Calves per cow per year	0.91	1.0	-----
Calving's per Cow (*)	3.5	4.5+	-----
Recycled Cows (%)	10	0	-----
Births with known Sires (%)	90	100	-----
% Heifers Calved 22-26 months	90	100	-----

- ▶ How do you make use of this efficiency data:
 - ▶ Know the targets and how it affects profit. If you take the three with (*) and apply to the average 80 cow man, then his profit for the farm would increase by

€35,160. Massive!

- ▶ Calving Date:
 - ▶ The heifers should calve 5-7 days earlier than cows; so as to settle them in and, more importantly, because calving date slips 4-5days from one year to the next.
 - ▶ Median calving date: This is the date when the middle cow (cow no 50 in a 100cow herd) calves. For dry land in the south this should be around the 15thFeb and 7-10 days later for northern or wet land farmers or farmers on very high stocking rates.
 - ▶ Start of Calving to median calving Date. It should be less than 20 days and 15 days respectively for the cows and heifers.
- ▶ Calving period: The shorter this is the better and the target should be 10 weeks
 - ▶ Late calver will produce 50-100kgsMS less
- ▶ Age at calving:
 - ▶ Cows: The Moorepark target is 4.5+ lactations. Because it takes 1.6 lactations for a replacement heifer to pay back the costs of rearing her.
 - ▶ Heifers: On average the heifers will have to calve down at 1year and 11 months because we need most of the heifers to calve down in the 1st 3 weeks – that is early Feb. March calves must be well reared to meet all weight targets.
- ▶ Calving Interval: For every day longer than 365 the loss is 0.12c/l or €156 per cow for our national average farmer whose cows' yield 5200 litres.
- ▶ 6-week calving rate target is 90%. This is one of the key drivers of maximising profit from your cows:
 - ▶ Why are you not achieving it?
 - ▶ A genetically infertile herd!
 - ▶ Poor submission rate during the first 3weeks of breeding!
 - ▶ Having a scattered calving pattern at present!
 - ▶ Not synchronising heifers!
 - ▶ Poor feed management before or after calving! Many more!
- ▶ Calving's per Cow: It will be 1 if your herd's cows' calve every 365 day.
- ▶ Recycled cows: There is no financial gain, unless you have a very infertile herd to recycling cows. Also because it increases stocking rate there is a loss of Nitrate opportunities.
- ▶ Births to known sires: Must be 100% if you are serious of surviving in future – Nationally 50% of all replacements entering the dairy herd are by stock bulls. A shocking indictment on Irish dairy farmers and change agents!

Breeding Season data targets for 2019

- ▶ The 2019 fertility season determines the 6 week calving rate for 2020. Therefore, it is important to review 2019, so that you learn lessons for 2020 See Table 2.

Technical Efficiency		National Av Farm	Target	Yours
Mating Start Date:	Cows	??	???	
	Heifers	??	1 week earlier	
Start of Calving:	Cows	??	??	
	Heifers	??	7days earlier	
Length of Breeding	Cows	14 weeks	10weeks	
	Heifers	13 weeks	7weeks	
21-Day Submission Rate	Cows	69%	90%	
	Heifers	73%	100%	
42-Day Submission Rate:	Cows	85 %	100%	
1st Service Pregnancy Rate	61%	75%		
Short Repeat Intervals (%)		15%	10%	
Long Repeat Intervals		30%	15%	
Not In-calf (%)		11	15%	
Services/Conception by Lactation		??	1.7	
% In-calf by Bull Name:	(FR4022)	78%	65%	
	(Fr 3366)	50%	65%	

Table 2: Fertility Report and Targets for 2019 (Source ICBF Fertility Report)

- ▶ How do you make use of this efficiency data:
 - ▶ Know the targets and how it affects profit. Then act on the solution.
- ▶ Mating Start Date (MSD):
 - ▶ As for calving the heifers mating should be 5-7 days earlier than cows.
- ▶ Start of Calving to median calving Date. It should be less than 18 days and 15 days respectively for the cows and heifers.
 - ▶ Synchronisation of heifers is absolutely essential to achieve these targets
- ▶ Length of Breeding Season: This drives compact calving and weeds out infertility and poor heat detection.
- ▶ 21-day submission rate: It is the big driver of the 6-week calving rate. Submission rates are a function of previous calving date, good BCS management; good calving care, care from calving to mating and more than anything very good heat detection rate,
- ▶ 1st service pregnancy rate: This is really non-return rate (NRR) unless pregnancy is confirmed by scanning and it needs to be over 70%.
- ▶ Short Repeat Intervals: Some experts say that this indicates an “over-anxious AI man”. Probably getting heat identification wrong and deciding to “serve

anyway”. Also, a lot of farmers reserve a cow if she is on-heat the day after service.

- ▶ Long Repeat Interval: Indicates missed heat but it could be embryo loss also.
- ▶ This figure is a good indicator of your heat detection efforts.
- ▶ Percentage not incalf; It should be 10% or less based on scanning. It and 6-week calving figure are the real KPI's for fertility assessment on a farm.
- ▶ Services per Conception per Lactation: The target is 1.7 services per cow in calf.
- ▶ % in-calf by bull name: This is very useful info in that it can tell you, if one bull is low that his semen is suspect.
 - ▶ If all bulls are low it begs you to ask the question “why?”. It may be due to:
 - ▶ Poor AI man or poor management of straws on day of service or poor storage of AI straws,
 - ▶ Poor management of cows in day of service, resulting in stress,
 - ▶ Problems before, at or after calving,
 - ▶ Poor BCS at calving or loss of BCS from calving to mating,
 - ▶ Lack of energy with high % protein feeds from calving to mating.
 - ▶ Lack of key minerals, eg. Copper, iodine, selenium, cobalt etc.

Address Preventative Care

- ▶ Use your Vet to make a winter animal health preventative plan.
 - ▶ Also you should with his advice shift some vaccinations from Feb & March to now so as to reduce spring workload.
- ▶ Cows should be examined now for health related problems, such as, fluke, worms, lice, mastitis, lameness, etc so as to make their lives more comfortable and fruitful for calving; as well as being more profitable next year.
- ▶ Confirm the presence of health problems with a blood or milk test
- ▶ If cows on wet, and for that matter even dry, farms have not already been treated for fluke they should be done now.
- ▶ Young cows, if they are scouring, may need a worm dose.
 - ▶ Happens when immune system is low due to over-use of dosing at calf stage.
- ▶ All stock must be done for lice at least once if not twice during winter.
 - ▶ Some farmers see a benefit of clipping a strip of hair along the backbone as is done on weanlings and beef cattle.
- ▶ To prevent mastitis arising during the dry period keep the cow's bedding very clean during the first 28 days after drying off.

- ▶ Clean off cubicle ends and put lime or sawdust on them every day.
- ▶ 'Keep an eye' out for cows developing mastitis during the dry period.
- ▶ At the end of December you must start feeding pre-calving minerals (start 40 days before calving) to cows that will be calving in January-February.
- ▶ Throw 100 grams per cow per day on the silage, half in the morning, and half in the evening.
- ▶ Pre-calving minerals are essential to prevent, retained placenta, calving difficulty, poor thrive, depraved appetite, calf death etc.
- ▶ Will cost €2.50 - €3.00 and is very good value.
- ▶ To save money there is no need for minerals for March or April calvers for another month or so.

Has BCS improved?

- ▶ In October/November we advised you to separate out thin cows and feed them 1-1.5 kgs of meal.
- ▶ They should now (4-5 weeks later) be on a condition score of 3.
 - ▶ They must be at calving BCS one month before calving because they will not put on any condition in the last month.
 - ▶ If they are not they will be in trouble at calving.
 - ▶ Their feed must not be good enough so more meals will be necessary until 4 weeks before calving from when it should be decreased to 1.0kgs per day.
- ▶ Fat cows (condition 3.5 - 4.0) should be restricted to 25-30 kgs of fresh silage (70%DMD) plus 4-5kgs of straw or ad lib poor silage or hay.
 - ▶ They must be in a separate pen.
 - ▶ Over fat cows will have low % fat and protein after calving, they will have cystic ovaries, delayed return to bulling, and other health problems.
- ▶ If you now have half (25kgs) of a condition score to put on:
 - ▶ Then you need 125 kgs of meal extra with 65 DMD silage.
 - ▶ Plan out how best you can do it, but you need very good silage plus meals.
- ▶ If thin cows and fat cows are not managed separately

from the main herd then they will milk 200+litres less during the first 8 weeks of lactation and have less than a 40% chance of going in calf to the first service.

Cow feet care is neglected!

- ▶ Lameness is costing €100-€150 per case, depending on the type.
- ▶ Firstly, identify what is causing the problem - too much meal, rough concrete yards, terrible dirty yards and passages, overcrowding resulting in cows walking awkwardly on ends of cubicles and walls, poor air movement, stress etc.
 - ▶ You must rectify whatever is causing the problem (preventative work) because subsequent control measures are expensive and inconvenient.
 - ▶ Before you dismiss preventative care, remember that research has shown that a cow that gets a sole ulcer in one lactation is very likely to get one again in subsequent lactations.
- ▶ Include some pulp in the ration and never feed more than 3.5 kgs at any one feeding.
 - ▶ High yielders should get a mid day feed.
 - ▶ Run scrapers often to keep passageways clean and have one cubicle for every cow.
- ▶ Good ventilation entails having 1 sq. ft. per cow inlet and 2 sq. ft outlet per cow all the time and not just opening doors when you think the atmosphere in the cubicle house is stuffy.
 - ▶ You have read it here will you check it?
 - ▶ This is fundamental to preventing other problems.
- ▶ Routine hoof pairing has enormous benefits.
 - ▶ Experiments have shown that not all cows that had sole ulcers were lame and first calving heifers were likely to be severely affected by lameness.
 - ▶ It is suggested that farmers should use an expert, the Farm Relief Service for this purpose during December.
 - ▶ Record the cases of lames on the ICBF site. This will help ICBF identify bulls that are more prone to lameness.
 - ▶ It will help to reduce the number of expensive "fire brigade" calls and ensure low culling rates due to



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lameness.

- ▶ Money well spent.
- ▶ Mortellaro has become more common recently.
 - ▶ It is a virus condition around the feet resulting in the foot being badly swollen (not hot) between the claws with a bad smell.
 - ▶ An Alamycin spray every day for a few days will clear it up, using the following procedure – wash, dry, spray and dry.
 - ▶ In more severe cases a footbath of Lyncomycin, Tetracycline, or Opticide will cure the problem, but do not overuse antibiotics and alternate these products to prevent resistance developing.
 - ▶ Consult your Vet.
- ▶ Walk cows through ordinary footbath (4 litres Formalin or 4-5 kgs bluestone or zinc sulphate in 200 litres of water) on three consecutive days, morning and evening, every month is useful where lameness is a developing problem.
- ▶ You must remove the cause of the problem before any treatment becomes effective.

Replacement Heifer Management

- ▶ Heifer target weights on 1st Dec and quality of silage drive the decisions:
 - ▶ Weanlings should be 43% of the cows' mature weight; 235-245kg
 - ▶ Incalf heifers should be 83% of the mature weight; 455 – 470kgs.
- ▶ Between 1 Dec and 1st April is 120 day. Animals should now be 220 kgs and should be 320. Therefore, they need to gain 80kgs weight or 0.67kg/hd/day.
 - ▶ Only 75% DMD silage comes near that gain.
 - ▶ With 65% and 70% DMD you will need to feed 2kgs or 1.4kgs meal (16%P) ration respectively.
 - ▶ Small weanlings (less than 220 kgs) should be on 1-2 kgs meal (14-16% protein) with good silage,
 - ▶ Strong weanlings need no meals so that they are not heavier than 340kgs on 1st May; otherwise conception rate will be poor.
- ▶ Have lice returned?
 - ▶ Treat again if necessary.
- ▶ Walk through your pens (carefully) weekly and check for:
 - ▶ Mildly lame heifers being slow to go to feed (take them out).
 - ▶ Adequacy of lying space and using cubicles.
 - ▶ Adequacy of meal/silage feeding space.
- ▶ Heifers must be fed regularly.
 - ▶ Same time every day for meals and silage.
 - ▶ Move in silage to feed trough so animals do not have to stretch or struggle.
 - ▶ Dry cow minerals should be introduced in late Dec for early Feb calving heifers.
- ▶ Avoid stress causing poor fertility in 1st calvers by mixing

cows and in-calf heifers now rather than after calving;

- ▶ They must have a cubicle for each cow, plenty of silage feed face, adequate room at the standing area where feeding silage and easy access points to the silage feeding.
- ▶ To ensure your contract rearer achieves target weights on 1st May 2020 discuss the following with him:
 - ▶ Present weight relative to targets, with particular emphasis on animal under and over target.
 - ▶ The quality of the silage and its potential to achieve target weights on 1st April – it must be analysed for DMD and minerals.
 - ▶ The housing; overstocked animals grossly under-perform.

Feeding Silage Care

- ▶ Pit management greatly influences the “freshness” of silage.
 - ▶ Remember air rots silage, so, you must manage the pit face to minimise air penetration.
 - ▶ Use a shear grab or saw to cut down or remove silage from the face.
 - ▶ Only disturb small areas of the pit at each feeding.
 - ▶ Do not leave layers of tossed silage exposed to the air.
 - ▶ Prevent water running down the face of the silage pit by rolling back the polythene.
 - ▶ But weigh down this polythene tightly on top and at the sides.
 - ▶ Too many farmers pull down the polythene over the face of the pit.
- ▶ This is wrong, as it causes the glass-house effect, results in quicker rotting and fungal growth.
 - ▶ Nothing could be worse for silage intake.
- ▶ Research has showed the following:-
 - ▶ Cows spend 6 hours per day eating silage.
 - ▶ Cows have three feeding activity peaks, viz- sunrise, feed placement and feed push-up.
 - ▶ Cows will generally only spend 10 minutes queuing for silage and then get “fed up” waiting.
 - ▶ Severe wind and rain on exposed feeding area reduced silage intakes by 4 kgs DM per head per day.
 - ▶ Cows housed in groups of 24 eat 1 to 2.6 kgs DM per head per day more silage than those in groups of 8, because they eat faster, more frequently but spend less time eating.
- ▶ The implications may be worth applying, and remember thousands of euros are lost annually on poor pit management.

Financial plan for 2020

- ▶ Financial management on most dairy farms is at an all-time low. Farmers just don't want to do it with the result decisions are made in the dark and motivation is lacking to become more efficient.

- ▶ What are my costs?
- ▶ Can I reduce some or all costs?
- ▶ Is my gross output per litre too low and why?
- ▶ What is my net profit per hectare? The target is €2,500. Why am I so far off it?
- ▶ Answer these questions and make a plan for 2020.
- ▶ You can't answer these questions or make plans for 2020 unless you complete a Dairy Profit Monitor for 2019.
 - ▶ With your Accountant assemble the data early in Dec and bring to your Adviser.
 - ▶ It must done in December-January to get most benefit out of it in 2020.
 - ▶ You should spent 2-3 hours with your adviser interpreting the data and doing a financial plan for next year.

Bits and pieces

- ▶ You must get your milking machine tested NOW.
- ▶ Put all machinery in good working order – don't wait till it breaks down.
- ▶ Calf sheds must be made operational; Jan is too late as pressure is on to do short term jobs/tasks. Have you adequate calving area and calf housing?
- ▶ Farm infra-structures must be reviewed so that they are adequate and "fit for purpose"
 - ▶ Walk your roadways/paddocks with a notebook and biro noting broken stakes; poorly tensioned wires; leaking/overflowing water troughs (they should be emptied in winter to avoid frost damage); dirty and water laden paddock entrance; sections of roadways that are poor and holding water.
 - ▶ Get in some help to do these tasks so that you can concentrate on the planning aspects of your farm –

mostly office work.

Mix incalf heifers with 2nd calvers and thin cows so that they get used to being with cows as it helps to reduce stress and weight loss post calving.

Happy Christmas to my readers!

This is a great time of the year; enjoy it with your family by relaxing with plenty of time off. You deserve it!

Note:

Very rapid growth of a business is often a killer because management usually cannot keep pace with the growth.

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