

Why milk recording is so important!

Michelle McGrath, Assistant CellCheck Programme Manager

Hopefully you have gotten through the busy spring period safely and are now turning the focus to the breeding season. Many of you are aware of the new veterinary medicine regulation that will come into effect at the end of January 2022. While antibiotics may still be used therapeutically, for example to treat mastitis, it may not be used to prevent infection. This will change how farmers can use dry cow antibiotic in particular, as you can no longer use it in cows that don't have any evidence of infection. You might ask how are you supposed to decide if a cow needs antibiotics at drying off or not? This is why milk recording is so important, now, more than ever. You need to have individual cow information, collected from every cow during their lactation, from at least 6 milk recordings. To get the best information from these milk records, the first milk recording should be done within 2 months of calving and the last recording within a month of drying off and the remainder spread out during the rest of the lactation. If you haven't started milk recording yet, it's never too late to start and the gains start straight away!

As you may know, each month we are profiling farmers who have moved away from blanket dry cow therapy to selective dry cow therapy (SDCT) and how they went about it successfully. The aim of this is to help farmers prepare for the changes that will come with the new legislation and to try and deal with the concerns farmers have around SDCT.

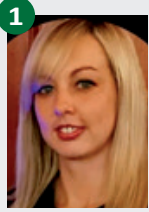
You might ask why are we talking about drying off cows in April, but what you do now will matter when it comes to drying off in the Autumn. This month I spoke to Martin Davin from Rathdowney in Laois to see what advice he would give to farmers making the switch to SDCT. He has been doing it for 5 years now and his confidence in using SDCT is growing every year. He carries out his first milk recording in "mid-March, which is essential as this lets me know how successful the dry cow period was and if any new infections were picked up during this period. I complete 6 milk recordings in total during the year which helps identify any cow with a high cell count and helps me to identify the cows that will need antibiotics at drying off. Every clinical case is recorded and sampled during the year and these cows will also get an antibiotic at drying off. This also helps build up a profile of the types of bacteria in the herd which is important for picking mastitis tubes". When collecting these samples, he uses the same sterile procedure that he uses at drying off to ensure the sample is not contaminated and gives accurate results. Cases that don't respond to treatment are dried off early, and Martin finds that they often come back into milk normally the following year.

One of the main advantages Martin sees with SDCT is “less stress worrying about antibiotics getting into the tank after calving”. Because he limes the cubicles twice a day, singes the hair off cow’s udders and clips the tails he has also “seen a positive effect on calf health too as calves are less likely to drink from a dirty udder or get milk that has been contaminated with faeces”. He says that “while there is a monetary saving from using less antibiotics, I spend most of this on extra lime during the dry period, extra gloves and time spent at the drying off process. But this is non-negotiable to ensure the process is successful and to ensure dirt isn’t getting infused into the teats during the drying off process. I also can’t dry off too many cows at one time, or I won’t be able to do it right.”



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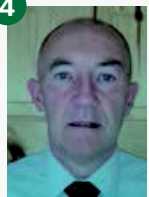
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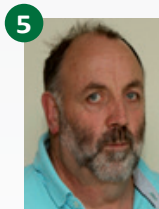
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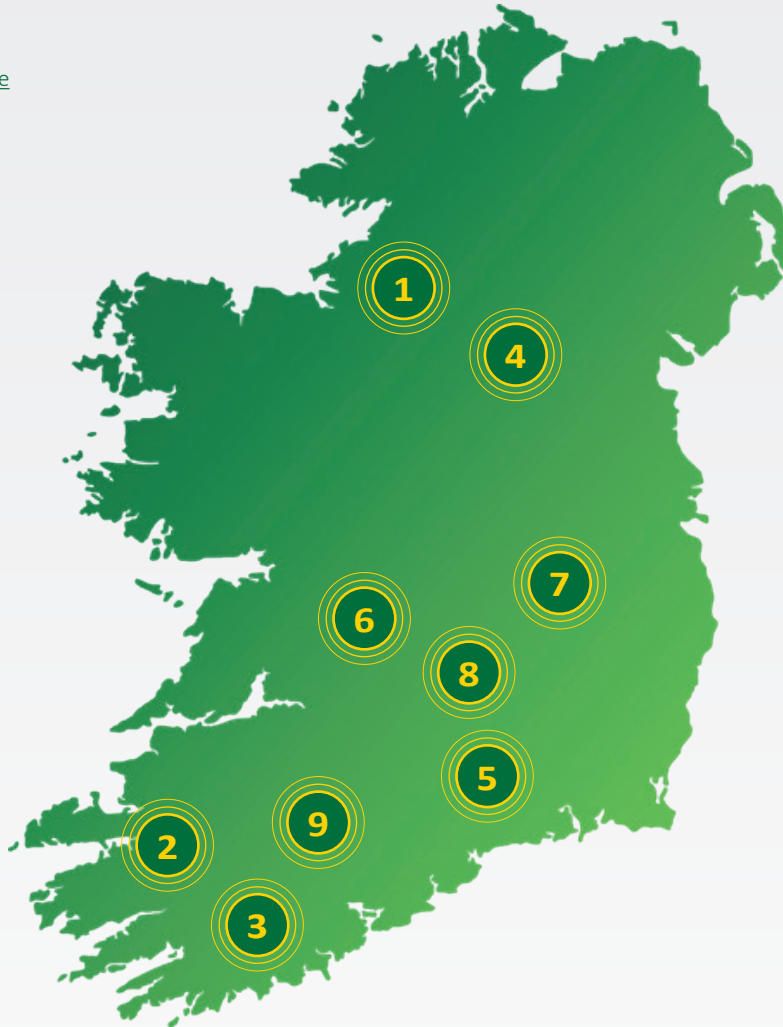
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