



Huge need for more AI bred dairy stock

Increasing milk quota from the EU, declining cow numbers and not enough dairy AI bred replacements pose a threat that Ireland will not fill national milk quota again. This week, **Jack Kennedy** asks **Pat Dillon**, Teagasc Moorepark, where dairy farmers should go now

JK: Is there a real threat that Ireland will not fill national milk quota again?

PD: Yes, unless we increase dairy cow numbers in Ireland. The European dairy industry is undergoing some significant changes. The Irish dairy industry is facing a number of challenges this year and in the coming years. Now is the time for Irish dairy farmers to make the right decisions to set their farms up for the next five to 10 years.

National milk quota will increase by 9.3% by 2013. Explain this to me in terms of actual milk production nationally?

It's like this — we produced 4.95m tonnes of milk in 2009/10 and can produce 5.6m tonnes of milk in 2013 and still be within our national quota.

Pat we are running at least 10% under our current quota (in the 2009/2010 quota year). Where will this extra milk come from? Some of it will come from higher milk yield per cow but, in my opinion, over 50% of this extra milk will be filled from increasing cow numbers rather than increasing milk yield per cow.

Have you calculated what extra dairy cows will be required?

Our suggestion is that Ireland will need 70,000 more cows milking in 2013 to fill this

quota. We need to move from 1.105m cows currently to 1.173m cows nationally, that's an increase of 70,000 cows. We have factored into this figure higher milk solids per cow and we suggest, on average, that milk solids will increase by about 1.25% per year between 2009 and 2013.

How can a farmer do something about increasing cow numbers this year?

For me one of the biggest challenges for every dairy farmer is to get more dairy AI bred stock on the ground, so that more milk can be produced in Ireland. It is the single biggest issue for dairy farmers.

If we don't improve the number of AI bred replacements born, then we haven't a hope of filling our national quota again. We need to maximise the number of AI bred calves born on farms from now on.

Why are you saying this now?

Traditionally, farmers have been thinking about quota as a restriction but, now, it is very clear to me that the restriction is the quantity and quality of dairy replacement stock.

Over the next four to six weeks, farmers will be buying

AI straws and I suggest that farmers need to set a minimum target of 70% to 80% of the animals available for breeding actually bred to AI.

This means that breeding every dairy animal to AI in the first six weeks of breeding, including maiden heifers. If they do not want replacements within their own herds, then there is a large market for quality AI bred replacements within Ireland or overseas.

What is your opinion on the quality of sires available this year?

For me, this is probably the best year in terms of high quality semen availability since the new EBI breeding system was created in 2001. Farmers have a choice of great quality AI straws whether it is high EBI Holstein Friesian, High EBI Jersey or high EBI young genomic bulls, all at reasonable prices. There are no excuses in terms of availability this year.

But Pat money is tight for purchasing AI straws this year?

Yes, for some farms, money is tight but I seriously think there is a long-term payback on using AI this year. In some instances last year, money from replacement sales was the only profit made on farm. Replacement sales shored up many accounts. If you can buy high EBI straws for less than €15 each, then it is a great investment in your business.

When selecting straws, what should farmers be focusing on?

For me, fertility is still the big one.

The national figures suggest that average EBI is €63, with only €25 coming from fertility. This is far too low and we will not make progress on increasing cow numbers as a country, while this figure is so low. Every farmer should target sires with a high fertility sub index, preferably over €90. Figures from ICBF suggest we are recycling almost 20% of cows and, yet, we are still dropping cow numbers nationally.

Where can farmers get more information?

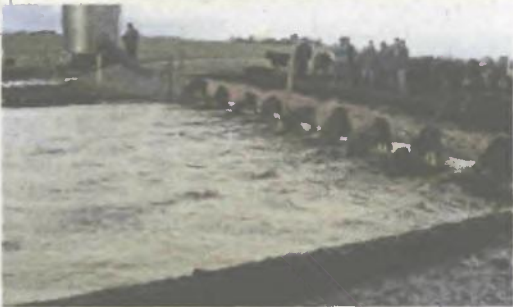
For more discussion and information, come to the Ballydague open day on Tuesday 23 March but, more importantly, sit down now and calculate how many AI straws you need for your herd this year.



Pat Dillon, Teagasc.



On trial this year at Ballydaque research farm (open day next week) was another way of housing young stock over the winter. Instead of wood chip on a stand-off pad, weanling heifers were lying on thick rubber laid down over concrete. The rubber mats are flush washed with all water travelling by gravity down over the rubber into the earthen bank tank. As the recycled water is going over, the rubber it gathers any dirt lying on the rubber.



Water is collected from the stand-off pads into a small earthen bank tank and pumped up into a large steel holding tank. The water can then be manually released through wavin pipes at the head of the rubber matted area. Billy Curtin, Ballydaque farm manager said the cost of the rubber is only part of the overall cost and other costs include (1) availability of recycled water, (2) steel holding tank, (3) feeding area, (4) earthen bank tank, etc. He said existing yards could be modified and heifers have performed well over the hard winter.



All waste water from the rubber is funnelled into a large earthen bank tank.