

Labour Efficiency and Spring Workload

Edition 2

Spring Management Series 2021



Calving, calf rearing, slurry, fertiliser and spring grazing are in full swing across the Lakeland Dairies region. In this second edition of Labour Efficiency & Spring Workload we discuss tips on looking after yourself, managing a busy spring milking routine and peak calf numbers including the effect on workload and accommodation. Also, we look at how contractors are an essential part of a successful farm team.

Look after yourself

You are the most important member of your farm. Busy days and nights take a toll on the body and mind. Always make sure to look after yourself over the next few busy weeks.

- ▶ Eat well: plenty of fruit and vegetables and drink plenty of water.
- ▶ Try to ensure that you get a good night's sleep. If possible, share night calving duties.
- ▶ Make time to keep in touch with other farmers, friends and family.
- ▶ Taking time to do something different, even for a short while, can help to re-energise you.
- ▶ Where possible, share the workload, as other family members may be able to help.



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.

"Cups on by 4pm at the latest"



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.

Many farmers recognise that unknown or late finishing times are making dairying an unattractive career. This is a critical issue when it comes to succession and retaining young people’s interest in dairying as a career.

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:

- 1. Minimal calf movements and contacts**
 Efficient farmers apply a system to reduce the number of contacts with each calf. Once a calf is born within 30 minutes the calves are removed. Calves are tagged, recorded, navels dipped and fed with colostrum, then moved to a group pen with other new-born calves. Those calves remain in the same pens until they are sold, weaned, brought to the contract rearer, or moved to outdoor rearing. Look closely at your calf routine. Discover if calf movements and contacts could be reduced.
- 2. Selling beef and dairy bull calves early**
 A 100-cow dairy farm reducing the age of sale from 6 weeks to 2 weeks, as shown in table 1 below, could potentially reduce the peak number by over 35 calves, which would be a huge pressure reduction on calf accommodation and labour. Have a plan of how calves will be sold and removed off farm. This could be by mart sale, on farm sale or moving them to the contract rearer.

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 ²)
70%	2 weeks	47	80m ²
70%	4-5 weeks	70	119m ²
85%	2 weeks	50	85m ²
85%	6 weeks	85	145m ²



3. Milk transport and preparation

Suitable ways to move milk around the farm, e.g. using milk karts with accessible sheds, play an important part in reducing manual strain in the calf rearing period. Time efficient farmers have workstations. These areas contain all the essentials to mix milk replacer, tagging equipment etc. Organise an area to complete all the calf rearing jobs and to store all your calf equipment and supplies.

4. Once-a-day milk feeding

OAD feeding is a practice that can greatly reduce the labour required during the rearing period as we enter March. Research conducted by Teagasc has shown no difference in the level of performance achieved by calves on OAD or TAD (twice a day) feeding. In addition, studies have pointed to a 25-36% reduction in the labour input required for OAD compared to TAD feeding systems. **It is important to wait until 28 days to commence OAD milk feeding.** This provides the calf's rumen with adequate time to develop and ensures sufficient volumes of concentrates and long fibre are being consumed. *Further information on OAD milk feeding will available in the next edition.*



The milk kart and milk warmer used on the Clarkes' farm

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.



Farmer Focus



Alan and Thomas Clarke Killinkere, Virginia, Co. Cavan

Farm Profile

Started calving: 28th January

% of herd calved: 45%

Spring Labour: Alan, Tommy, Student (Mon-Fri),
Neighbour (Sat & Sun)

**Most effective labour-saving practice
this month:** Once-A-Day milking in February

During the spring there are two people milking. We prepare and check the cows' udders. The student working with us then attaches the clusters and does the teat spraying. There is a lot of fetching cows and holding tails at the start. Having two people milking really speeds up the milking process.

Calf care is going to plan. The milk kart and milk warmer help divide the milking from the calf feeding. Once calves are drinking independently, they are batched in groups of twelve. Straw bedding and concentrates are supplied to calves around mid-day when all the morning jobs are complete.

Grazing will be starting this week, practicing on-off grazing for 3-4 hours at a time. Recent investments in underpasses make putting cows to grass a one-person job. **Grazing is a high profit task on the farm.**



The extra student labour on the farm means the grazing is done successfully. We get time every week to walk the farm and pick suitable places to graze. We have the protected urea in the yard, ready to go. In the next few days, before the end of February, we should have spread most of the grazing ground with fertiliser or slurry.

The student this year started with us on 1st February. The first week is spent making him comfortable with his surroundings and understanding the farm system.

During this week he shadows us learning the ropes. There is a lot to learn about the farm. The location of tools, light switches, machinery operation, etc. Once we find out what the student is good and confident at, we usually keep them at those routine jobs. The student is content and we're happy when he is productive.



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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