MUNSTER BOVINE

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Munster Bovine

Decision making on cows not to retain this winter?

As we enter into the closing months of a challenging year, attention will start to turn to dry off and the dry period. A very difficult spring turned into a difficult grass growing year. Tonnes of dry matter of grass grown are well down in most areas. Significant volumes of concentrates have been delivered to farms over the past six weeks.This clearly demonstrates an effort to compensate for poor growth, an attempt to build covers, preserve existing silage stocks and perhaps attempt to build silage reserves by conserving additional silage. Feeding concentrates to cows during the dry period, can risk cows becoming over conditioned which will increase the risk of metabolic problems during early lactation. It makes more sense to feed into late lactation and produce milk rather than fatten the cow during the dry period.

Culling Decisions

When decisions are being made on which cows not to retain, cows fall into one of two categories – involuntary or voluntary culls.

Involuntary culling – For a certain percentage of cows the decision is effectively out of your hands - empty cows, very old cows, bad foot problems, udder problems (chronic SCC, mastitis, quarter lost), etc.

Voluntary culling – These cows are surplus to requirements but don't fall into the category of the involuntary culls. Other criteria can be examined for these cows – calving date, production, profitability, genetics, parity..

Most herds aim for a replacement rate of around 20%. A high replacement rate affects profitability due to the higher cost of carrying more replacements and the lost production attributed to having more young cows in the herd. First lactations produce 20-25% less than mature cows and second lactations produce 8-10% less than mature cows.

Keeping the involuntary culls to a minimum opens up the possibility of removing cows for poor production which ultimately will lift the average production of the herd. Excellent fertility performance, controlling SCC/mastitis and keeping lameness to a minimum is what makes this a possibility. In reality it is hard to achieve.

Unfortunately, external factors are also having a big bearing on the decisions to sell cows. Regulation like banding and the change to the nitrates derogation, as well as worries about autumn grass availability and winter silage stocks are forcing hard decisions to be made on cows to retain for 2025.

Using your milk recording report to aid decision making.

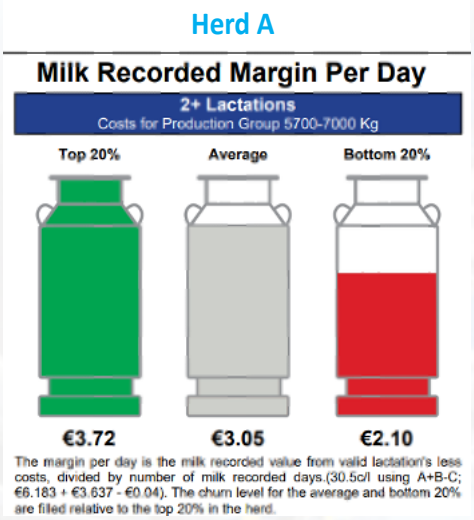
The milk recording and lifetime summary report brings all a cow's milk recording results into one € figure and ranks cows according to this figure. The churns at the beginning of the report give a visual representation of the difference in profitability between your best 20%, your average and your bottom 20%. The churns are filled relative to the lifetime margin per day figure for the second+ lactations cows in your herd with the green churn always filled to capacity for the top 20%

Comparing the churns for Herd A and Herd B below

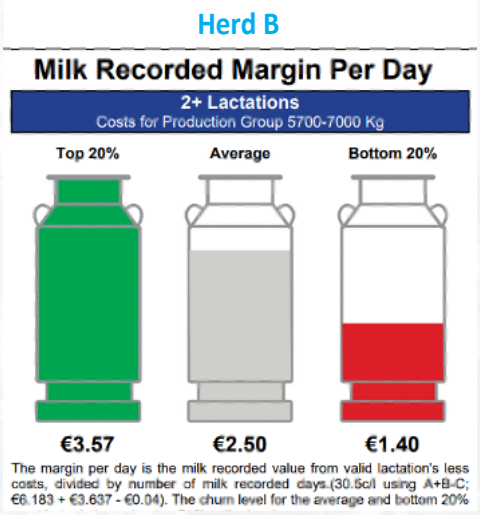
The overall lifetime margin per day figures cannot be used as a comparison between herds. While the herds are in the same cost of production category (5700- 7000 kg), the actual costs and overall production will differ from herd to herd. The lifetime margin per day figure is a within herd calculation and used to compare and rank cows within a herd not between herds.

Herd A's grey and red churns are filled closer to the green churn than herd B's. This means herd A's average cows and bottom 20% cows are performing closer to the top 20% compared to herd Bs. The fuller the grey and the red churns are, the more uniform the profitability of the cows in the herd is, bearing in mind there will always be a top and a bottom 20% regardless of the herd. The only way to fill the grey and the red churn higher, and thereby improve the overall herd profitably is by removing some of the poorest cows from the bottom 20% (red churn).

Herd A



Herd B



Using the 'Red Card' to select cows for performance

3rd Lactation+ Cow Performance Group
(50 3rd Lactation+ Animals Ranked)

MUNSTER BOVINE

								Test Day						Current Lactation to Date (LTD)				Milk Recorded Lifetime (Life)				
Jumbo	Name	Sire	Calving Date	Lact	Days In Milk	Prod SI (€)	Fert SI (€)	Current Test Milk (Kg)	Current Test Fat (%)	Current Test Protein (%)	Current Test Fat + Protein (Kg)	Current Test Lactose (%)	Current Test SCC '000	SCC Lact Status	LTD Milk (Kg)	LTD Fat + Protein (Kg)	LTD Margin Per Day (€)	Life Fat + Protein (Kg)	Avg Days Dry Per Lact	Life Total Days	Life Margin Per Day (€)	Group Rank
1920	HO (75%), FR (25%)	CFF	26/02/2024	4	150	17	67	30.6	2.02	1.67	1.13	1.93	18		5303	275	4.55	1521	86	1256	2.40	32
1921	HO (84%), FR (9%)		01/03/2024	3	146			23.1	4.10	3.16	1.68	4.15	110		4393	324	6.40	1742	104	1269	3.01	13
1922	HO (53%), FR (47%)	JKF	11/04/2024	4	105	51	36	33.3	3.15	3.08	2.07	4.66	14		3953	277	8.46	1666	104	1247	3.12	11
1929	HO (78%), FR (22%)	YAD	01/04/2024	4	115	30	98	25.5	3.44	3.12	1.67	4.16	32		3583	238	5.88	1378	108	1248	2.09	43
1938	HO (63%), FR (38%)	JKF	27/03/2024	4	120	66	49	28.6	3.77	3.45	2.06	4.63	18		3796	273	6.93	1602	103	1270	2.76	22
1944	HO (75%), FR (22%)	FR2385	25/02/2024	4	151	18	92	17.5	4.33	3.22	1.32	4.31	116		3911	256	4.30	1438	100	1263	2.16	42
1945	HO (66%), FR (34%)	FR2385	13/02/2024	4	163	10	95	24.5	3.14	2.97	1.50	4.38	26		4732	292	4.70	1364	92	1234	1.99	45

Cow 1920 – Red card on the lactation to date (LTD) margin per day but not red for the lifetime margin per day. This cow has perform fine over her lifetime but has slipped in to red for lactation to date. Why? These cows will often have a health reason for appearing here.

Cow 1929 – This cow is in red for her lifetime margin per day but is performing well in the current lactation. This cow is poor overall but improving so worth keeping on current performance.

Cows 1944 and 1945 – Both these cows have 'double Red Cards'. Bottom 20% on lifetime and lactation to date margin per day. They should be high on the list to go if the opportunity is there. Its also worth noting their genetic merit. The production (milk) subindex and fertility subindex is displayed for all cows. Both these cows have a high fertility subindex (92 & 95) and a low production subindex (18 & 10) which is the obvious explanation for the double red cards here. These two cows do not have the genetic potential to produce.

Decision making on SCC.

In the SCC section of your milk recording report cow are divided into 4 sections - persistently infected, recently infected, recently cured and healthy cows. The persistently infected cows have had 2 or more consecutive tests over 200000 in the current lactation. These are the cows to examine closely coming up to dry off. Cow 1321 below was high the pervious lactation and failed to cure fully over the dry period. This cow will stay high and will not cure. Her biggest threat is she is a source of infection at milking time to the rest of the cows.

This month, in preparation for dry off consider submitting samples for culture and sensitivity, clip tails and ensure cubicles and housing is ready. Do all possible to ensure cows arrive at dry off as clean as possible.

Persistently Infected Cows

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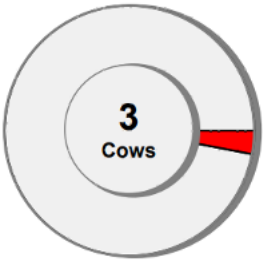
Somatic Cell Count - SCC



Persistently Infected

These cows have two consecutive tests over 200,000 SCC in the current lactation or if this is their first test after calving they did not cure over the dry period. % of Cows with Persistent Infections in your herd was 3%; target is less than 8%.

- Avoid spread from these cows to the non-infected cows in the herd.
- Implement parlour controls; pre and post spraying and/or cluster flush or dipping.
- Consider culling if more than one quarter is infected and they remain persistently high, or drying off the quarter if a single quarter is infected.

Cow ID	Calving Date	Lact	Current SCC 25/07/2024	% Tank SCC	SCC 31/05/2024	SCC 29/03/2024	SCC 27/10/2023	SCC Last test previous lact	SCC Average previous lact
1712	07/02/2024	6	**642**	11.7	1527	84	118	118	**72**
1321	09/05/2024	9	**450**	8.9	371		6667	6667	**1094**
1781	15/03/2024	5	**227**	4.3	299	134	80	80	**66**