

### Demonstration farmer update from Michael and John Casey, Causeway, Co. Kerry.

**The Caseys are carefully preparing for the upcoming breeding season by devoting significant time and consideration to selecting cows for breeding replacement dairy heifer calves, as well as choosing the appropriate dairy and beef sires.**

After achieving success with sexed semen in 2022, they have decided to continue using this technique to generate most of their dairy replacements. Out of a herd of 135 cows, they have identified 50 that meet their selection criteria for sexed semen and have purchased 40 sexed straws for these cows, as well as 30 for the maiden heifers.

They use DIY AI on the farm, which allows them to take advantage of two windows per day to inseminate the cows with sexed semen following recommendations to inseminate the cows 14 to 20 hours after observing them in heat. Although the Caseys acknowledge that this method is more labour-intensive than once-a-day AI, they believe it pays significant dividends.

They plan to use eleven dairy sires that meet the Teagasc bull selection criteria, with a bull team average EBI of €270, €120 fertility, €100 milk, and PTA's for Bfat% and Prot% of 0.27 and 0.17, respectively. Additionally, they will use six beef sires that are known for being easy to calve, with short gestation periods and good terminal traits.

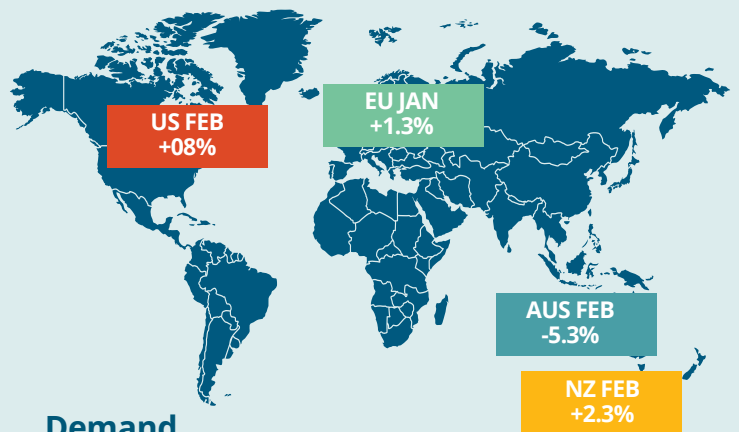
The maiden heifers will be fixed time AI to sexed semen, and any heifers that repeat will receive a conventional AI straw, with an Angus bull used for subsequent breeding. In early April, the cows were tail-painted, and the vet will examine any cows that haven't cycled and have calved more than 35 days prior to the start of breeding. Finally, April calving cows will be managed via a fixed time AI program.

## MILK MARKETS OVERVIEW

Commodity prices, especially for powders and to a lesser extent fat, have dropped in Europe in the past month. However, cheese is experiencing less pressure. Due to the expensive cost of cash, companies are eager to dispatch products as they are produced and avoid holding excess stocks in their warehouses. While gas prices have decreased due to favorable weather in the spring, they remain much higher than they were two years ago, leading to high processing costs.

### Supply

Despite concerns about demand, milk production growth has exceeded expectations in the first few months of 2023. Good pasture growth in New Zealand has contributed to this trend, and while EU farmgate prices have begun to fall, they are still relatively high compared to long-term averages. While wet weather in Ireland has made conditions challenging, rain across mainland Europe has been welcome as land had been very dry. Milk production is expected to decrease in the second half of this year due to farm-level margins coming under pressure, but for the time being, there is more milk available than anticipated.



### Demand

Weak demand is currently the biggest factor impacting markets. Chinese imports were down in January and February, and while buying from northeast Asia has picked up slightly at recent GDT events, it is not enough to offset weaker demand from other regions. Although demand was strong from the rest of the world in the second half of 2022, import statistics and anecdotal evidence suggest that demand has fallen since the start of 2023. There is still plenty of local milk in China, which is dampening their demand for global products. While farmers worldwide are facing pressure on margins, it is uncertain how quickly they will reduce production. In the meantime, imports (particularly WMP) are being replaced by domestic products.

## SPRING RESEEDING AND GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT TIPS:

- To achieve the best results, plan to reseed early.
- Identify poor-performing paddocks based on dry matter yield in 2022, proportion of ryegrass in the sward, and weed burden.
- Refer to soil test results and apply lime, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium as necessary to maximize your reseeding investment.
- Reseed in spring to reduce risk, as typically better conditions are available for establishment and weed control.
- Use glyphosate to kill established weeds and grasses to prevent invasion into the new sward. Weeds should have healthy leaves and be actively growing for best results. For clover, this step is essential as it may be the last chance to control adult weeds.
- Regardless of the method, use the best available equipment to achieve a fine, firm seedbed. During dry conditions, seedbeds should not be allowed to dry out excessively. Roll immediately following each cultivation to achieve adequate consolidation and even establishment.
- If direct drilling, minimize dead material from the old sward or farmyard manure that could shade new emerging seedlings.



- If sowing a multispecies sward in areas of known high weed burden, consider practicing a stale seed bed method. No post emergence options are available. Prepare the seed bed fully without seeds. After weed seeds have germinated, use a reduced rate of glyphosate to kill seedlings. Apply seed afterwards with minimum soil disturbance.
- Select the most suitable Kerry Top Sward mixture for your intended use. These mixtures are specially formulated for the Kerry catchment. Varieties rated highly on the Teagasc Pasture Profit Index (PPI) are best for grazing. Select the level of clover depending on the intended use. Clover silage is growing in popularity on specific silage ground.
- If using high levels of clover, calibrate your seed drill as seed flow rates may be faster than standard grass seed. Sow at 14 to 16kgs per acre to achieve rapid canopy closure.
- Use a suitable clover-friendly post-emergence spray when clover shows its first three leaves. Docks should be clearly visible and the size of a €2 coin. Timing is important as grasses can quickly shade weeds from herbicide contact.
- Graze regularly once the sward is 6 inches high and maintain soil fertility.

## KEY MESSAGE FROM OUR APRIL FARM WALK SERIES

### Breeding

- Plan your order of conventional and sexed semen dairy straws based on number of replacement heifer calves required in 2024.
- One approach to AI straw use suggested was to use 28% sexed dairy semen, 15% conventional and 57% beef.
- As a guide, to generate 9 heifer calves you need to use 30 conventional straws or 20 sexed semen straws.
- Sexed semen in maiden heifers delivers very good results where heifer weight and AI timing is correct.

- Only use sexed semen on early calving cows in good condition with no health issues.
- Target a team of AI bull sires with 0.18% protein, €13 maintenance and €5 for health traits.

### Fertiliser

- Target is 80 units N/acre (incl. slurry) applied by May 1st (60 units on heavy soils).
- Slurry will contribute 9 units N, 5 units P and 30 units K per acre.
- Protected urea is the cheapest form of Nitrogen per unit of N.
- Use a compound like 18.6.12 on low P and K paddocks that haven't got slurry.



Milk Suppliers pictured at the recent SignPost Farm Walk on the farm of Michael and Alex McCarthy, Feenagh.

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# BCS and Minerals: The Key to a successful breeding season

The most important factors to maximise conception and submission rates on farm is maintaining the BCS of cows and the mineral balance of the diet.

Maintaining the BCS of cows, while limiting negative energy balance is the most effective way to ensure egg viability and maximise embryo survival. Excessive negative energy balance (weight loss) directly affects the yield and quality of the eggs (oocytes) available to be fertilized.

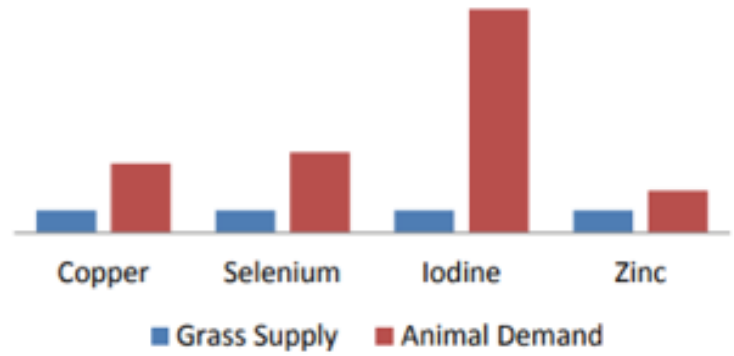
## Strategies to stabilise and improve body condition include:

- Feeding high energy/extra concentrates.
- Reducing the crude protein content of the diet.
- Increase intake of good quality grass.
- Once a day milking will, if necessary, help regulate energy balance.

At the beginning and right through the breeding season, 90% of cows in the herd should be a BCS of between 2.75 to 3.25.

Minerals and vitamins play a key role in the fertility status of cows. Unlike silage or concentrates the mineral profile of grazed grass can be variable. Grazed grass is also known to be low in some trace mineral elements including copper, selenium, iodine, cobalt, manganese and zinc, therefore it is critical that these are supplemented either through a free access mineral or included in the concentrate.

## Trace Element Supply from Grass versus Dairy Cow Demand



Source: Teagasc

Trace elements such as copper, zinc and selenium along with vitamin E have a key role in immunity status of the cow (vitamin E and selenium are known to work synergistically in this manner). Silent heats for example have been linked to deficiencies in both copper and manganese.

Don't miss out on a free Bloom Feeds bodywarmer as part of our breeding season promotion. Talk to your local Sales/Branch manager about our **Bloom Elite Propak Fertility** concentrate. Formulated with the highest quality ingredients to maximise the energy availability, including a class leading mineral, vitamin and additive pack to boost fertility performance this breeding season.



Milk Suppliers pictured at the Farm Info Zone Event in Castleisland.