

# CELLCHECK TIP OF THE MONTH

## Healthy heifers

**PRODUCING** replacement heifers for a herd can be a costly business - €1,451 according to Teagasc research. On average, it takes almost two lactations before this animal has covered her cost of production and starts generating income for you. With an investment like this, it's important to ensure that these animals have the best chance of producing top quality milk, for as long as possible within the herd.

Don't assume that 1st lactation animals are mastitis-free when they join the milking herd. Recent analysis of Irish milk recording herds showed that 23% of 1st lactation animals recorded within the 1st month of calving had a somatic cell count (SCC) over 200,000 cells/mL, while 13% had an SCC over 400,000 cells/mL. An SCC over 200,000 cells/mL is an indicator of at least one infected quarter. This research also showed that the milk yield of the 1st lactation animals with a first SCC over 400,000 cells/mL was reduced by 102 litres in that lactation and by 839 litres over their lifetime. Preventing mastitis in heifers is the key to ensuring productivity and longevity in the herd.



1. Check all quarters of all heifers with a California Mastitis Test (CMT) before milking them into the bulk tank, to identify any high SCC quarters.



2. Take a milk sample from any heifer that calves down with mastitis (clinical or subclinical), label it well and freeze it. You then have a bank of samples that can be cultured to identify the common bacteria, if necessary. This will help you investigate and prevent the problem recurring in the future.



3. New Zealand research has shown that teat spraying in-calf heifers three times a week, for at least 3 weeks before calving, significantly reduced the incidence of mastitis caused by *Strep. uberis* at calving.

For more information see the *CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control*