

Moving towards change

Michelle McGrath, Assistant CellCheck Programme Manager

Our farmer profile continues this month when we spoke with Eoghan McCarthy in Kerry who started using selective dry cow therapy (SDCT), in 2016 on around 10% of the herd but admits he had dabbled in it for a number of years before then. Eoghan milks 130 high yielding, spring calving cows and now practices SDCT (i.e. teat sealer only without dry cow antibiotic tube) on 60% of the herd. When asked what motivated him to begin SDCT he said that

'I have always listened to the debate on overuse of antibiotics on farms and was conscious of cutting down antibiotic use, but I still feel it is important to treat cows with antibiotics when needed, so I think the focus should be on encouraging people to use antibiotics properly and reducing the misuse of antibiotics or using them where they aren't needed.'



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Animal Health Ireland, 2-5 The Archways, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, N41 WN27



Eoghan began by emphasising the importance of regular milk recording,

‘we do our first milk recording within a month of calving in early March and one near the end of lactation’.

In total he does 7 milk recordings per lactation. At the end of lactation when he is selecting cows for SDCT he uses the ICBF records that will show the previous 11 recordings and the average for the previous year on one page.

‘this allows me to identify any cow that has a rise in SCC during the year and if this rise is significant then she will receive antibiotics.’

The criteria he has used for selecting which cows are suitable has altered slightly over the years and he has a few rules that he sticks to

‘an average SCC of 75,000 cells/mL or less and no spike over 120,000 cells/mL. Any cow that is a free milker gets an antibiotic, along with any cow that doesn’t lie in the cubicle as these are higher risk’.

It is important that after calving and before their first milking, that the cow’s teats are well cleaned and prepped, as this is a time when bacteria can easily get into the quarter. Completing a milk recording within a month of calving will identify any high SCC cow, on which Eoghan then uses the California mastitis test (CMT) to identify the problem quarter. He finds it is easier to cure them if identified early in lactation. Occasionally if they aren’t cured and

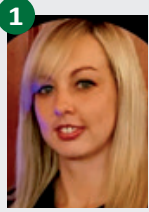
‘still have a high SCC in that quarter after 2 consecutive milk recordings then I will dry that quarter off for that year and more often than not it will be cured by the following year’.

Being well prepared and having good hygiene at drying off are two other important elements of ensuring a successful drying off event and having adequate clean housing during the dry period is also essential. We will focus more on his drying off procedure later in the season but for now, Eoghan’s advice is,

‘to start milk recording regularly, build up the cow information and next November just try a small number on SDCT; as the saying goes just dip your toe in the water but don’t jump in!’

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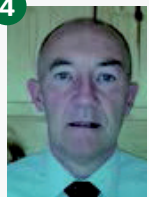
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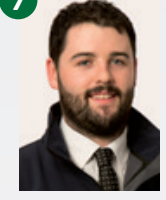
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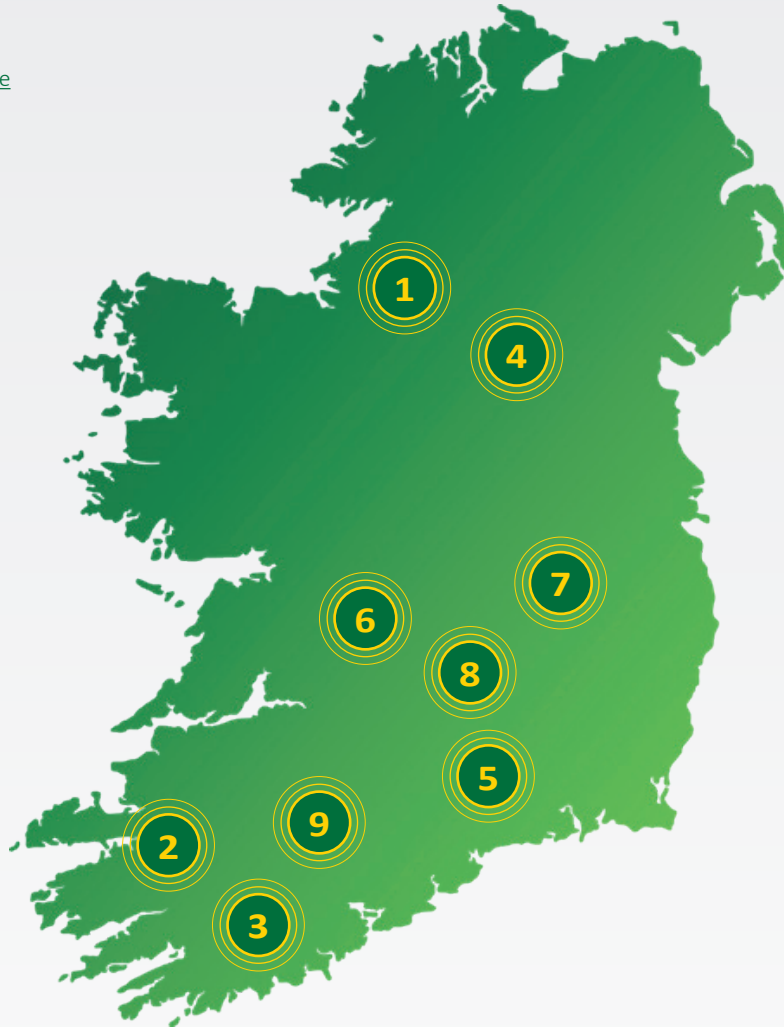
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