



Getting Winter Ready!

Michelle McGrath, Assistant CellCheck Programme Manager

Now is the time to catch up on farm maintenance and repairs, as before we know it, we will be housing animals for the winter. You might wonder what this has to do with managing mastitis in your herd but the reality is that mastitis in cows is almost always caused by bacteria which have gained access to the udder through the teat canal. While these bacteria may have spread from other infected cows (contagious mastitis) they may also be picked up in the cow's environment from soil, straw bedding/manure, cubicles or dirty passages. Anything that will reduce the numbers of bacteria in the cow's environment or minimise the exposure of teats to these bacteria will reduce the mastitis risk.

Some simple steps can be taken now to ensure cubicles are kept as dry as possible. Repair any cubicles that may have become loose during last season to make sure cows are lying correctly. If cubicles have not already been power hosed and disinfected there is still time to do it to reduce the level of bacteria in the environment. If you have mats, check the condition of them as any cracks act as a reservoir for bacteria. If cubicles are comfortable, cows will use them more often and udders and teats will stay cleaner. If you are in the process of building a new shed seek advice as early as possible, as the layout and flow of the housing area, cubicle design and dimensions are all important in ensuring a clean, comfortable and well-utilised environment for cows. Ensure you have enough cubicles, with a minimum of one cubicle per cow and ideally 10% more cubicles than cows to allow for normal cow behaviour and movement.

Service the scrapers and make sure they are working properly before the cows are in the sheds. Check slats for any damage that may need to be repaired. Check roofs and gutters; we have had a few storms since last spring so some damage may have been done that you may not necessarily notice until you take a closer look. Make sure housing is well ventilated; the presence of cobwebs can indicate poor ventilation. Clip cows' tails as this will help keep udders cleaner.



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All lights – both inside and outside – should be in good working order and any damaged lights or blown bulbs should be changed to ensure that it is easy to monitor housed animals. This is especially important post-drying off. Check water troughs and fix any leaks which may again add unnecessary moisture to the environment, which bacteria love. Fill in any holes around the yards or shed which may have developed and will lead to a build-up of manure.

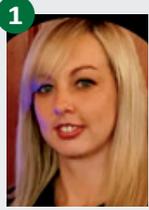


Pre-order lime or any bedding material that you will use and don't leave it until the last minute. Organise your last milk recording before drying off to ensure that you have the most up-to-date information on each cow before drying off.

Put a generator on your wish list! The initial cost of purchasing it will be covered before you know it. If you add up the cost of missed milk, rise in SCC and clinical cases of mastitis resulting from not being able to milk during power cuts, not to mention the stress endured by the farmer and the cows from not being milked, it makes sense!

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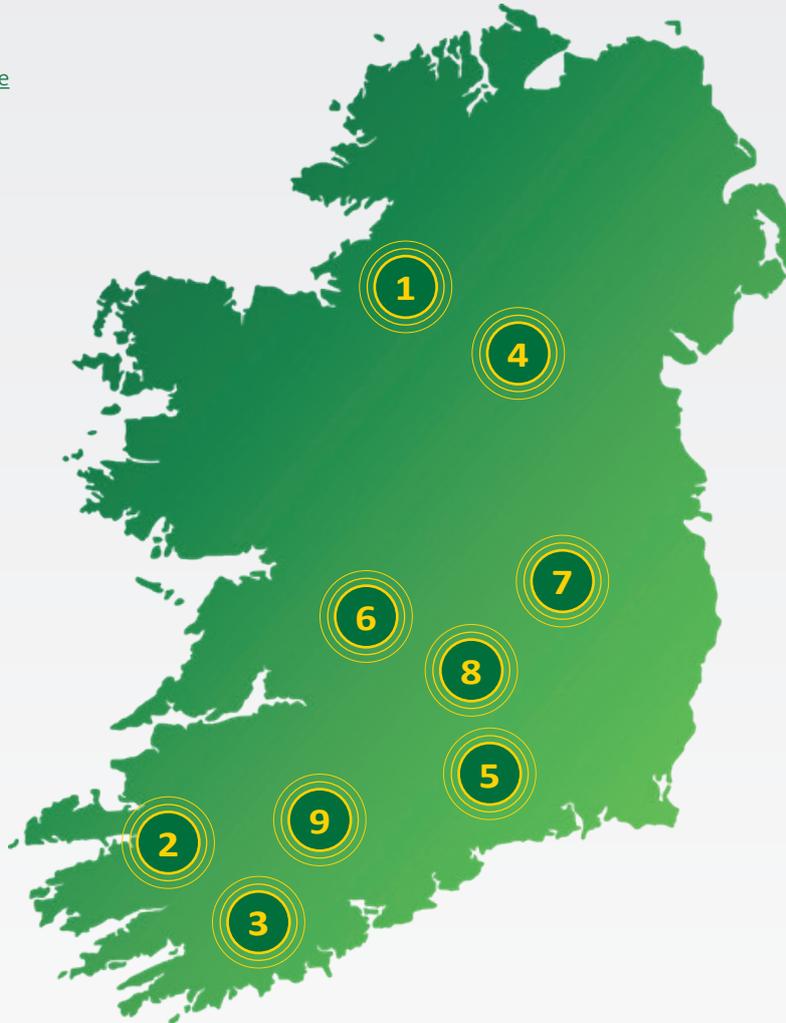
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