

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MILK RECORDING

Michelle McGrath, CellCheck Assistant Programme Manager

Milk recording offers a number of benefits that contribute to the long-term sustainability and profitability of dairy farms. Changes in milk composition or production patterns serve as early indicators of underlying health issues such as mastitis, metabolic disorders, or nutritional deficiencies allowing farmers to implement appropriate interventions as quickly as possible. After teat disinfection, milk recording is the next most important tool in dealing with high SCC and mastitis. High SCC cows are not only costing you money, which may not always be apparent, but they are also a source of infection for healthy cows. It is also the best tool available to establish which cows are the most profitable in the herd and that are most suitable to breed replacements from.

The recommendation from CellCheck is to complete a minimum of six milk recordings throughout lactation. Using SCC results from milk recording, farmers can detect and promptly respond to mastitis outbreaks and subclinical mastitis cases. The first milk recording should be completed within the first 60 days after calving. This allows assessment of the drying off and dry period performance. This is important because many infections in early lactation are actually picked up at drying off or during the dry period. Book this milk recording now to ensure you get a slot that suits you. To ensure that you are collecting this information from every cow within 60 days of calving, you may need to do a second recording a month or so after. This may seem like a lot of effort during an already busy time, but it is worth it in the long run. The last recording should be within 30 days of drying off, to assess the infection status of individual cows which is invaluable as we move away from blanket use of dry cow antibiotics. Keeping a record of all cows that have had a clinical case of mastitis throughout the lactation is also essential.

Milk recording reports

To achieve the full benefit of milk recording, look carefully at the reports that are generated after each recording. The CellCheck Farm Summary Report uses targets to give an overview of the key areas of mastitis control, highlighting the areas where control is effective and the areas that could be improved. One target is to have 85% of the herd with an SCC below 200,000 cells/ml; below this target indicates a mastitis problem. The report also shows the spread of infection during lactation by comparing SCC levels in consecutive recordings in each cow. This identifies those cows that have been recently infected, if their SCC is above 200,000 cells/ml in the most recent recording, or that are persistently infected, if they have had two consecutive recordings with an SCC above 200,000 cells/ml.

The importance of an industry approach - The Cell Count Solutions Consult

To help facilitate a collaborative approach to mastitis control between farmers and their service providers, a free veterinary-led consult for farmers has been developed by Animal Health Ireland called Cell Count Solutions. It highlights the important roles that different professions play in supporting farmers in the management of mastitis including farm and milk quality advisors, veterinary practitioners and milking machine technicians. [Click here](#) to apply for the consult.

