



Cell Check

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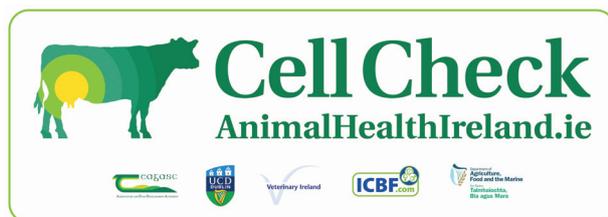


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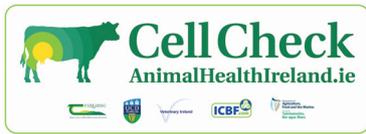
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Introduction & Rationale

Although Ireland is a relatively small dairy producer in global terms, accounting for less than 1% of world dairy production, the Irish dairy industry has a global reach, with 80% of all dairy production being exported. Over the last two decades, Ireland has become one of the world's leading producers of infant nutritional products; a number of the leading infant nutrition companies are located here and Ireland now supplies in excess of 15% of the global market for infant formula. High quality value-added-specialist dairy ingredients are also sold into the beverage, nutritional and bakery sectors globally. In 2011, the value of exported dairy products and ingredients reached €2.7 billion, a 17% increase on the previous year.

Mastitis reduces milk yield and leads to poor quality milk. Together, these factors erode the milk income received by farmers and processors. In addition, antibiotic therapy used to overcome udder disease adds to dairy farmers' costs and stress. Recent Teagasc research shows that farmers stand to improve net farm profit by at least 1 cent per litre by improving mastitis control. 2010 data from milk recording herds, shows that over 80% of herds¹ have an annual average SCC in excess of 200,000 cells/ml. Using this information as a proxy for the national herd, it is clear that there are opportunities to improve udder health nationally. *CellCheck* can play an important role in enhancing the quality of raw milk supply in Ireland, thereby improving profitability at producer and processor level and helping to ensure continued, sustainable access to valuable export markets.

2011 has been an important year for the development of *CellCheck*-the creation and piloting of technical resources, building awareness among farmers and service providers and facilitating collective action by the industry. A key focus for 2012 will be engagement with local service providers, with the objective of building regional capacity to support farmers in mastitis control, and ensuring that the information received by farmers is consistent and clear.

Mastitis is not just an inevitable part of farming and should not be accepted as such. However, the problem is multifactorial, and the response required must therefore be multidisciplinary in nature. 'Silver bullet' solutions are unlikely to be developed but neither are they required; effective, sustainable control of this disease is quite achievable through a preventative, team-based approach, built on a solid foundation of proven science and knowledge.

¹ The volume of milk produced by these herds is currently unknown. This will be the subject of further research by AHI and partner organisations.



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Objectives

- Building Awareness
- Establishing Best Practice
- Setting Goals
- Building Capacity
- Programme Evaluation

Building Awareness

A comprehensive communication strategy will introduce *CellCheck* to all target audiences, raising awareness of the factors contributing to and the problems associated with high SCC, and presenting realistic and achievable solutions to these problems.

Target audience groups:

1. Service Providers
2. Dairy Farmers
3. Industry
4. Public

Establishing Best Practice

CellCheck will develop a body of resources, tailored to the needs of various user groups, but consistent between these groups, which is evidence-based and subject to continual evaluation, including external peer review.

Delivery of best practice will be through targeted communications with all user groups, and through training seminars and other means, with an emphasis on active learning.



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Setting Goals

As an industry we should strive towards high standards, be it in milk quality, best practice on farm, or the provision of advice. *CellCheck* will facilitate the industry in setting ambitious but achievable goals for the somatic cell count of the national herd, by working closely with the *CellCheck* Industry Consultation Group. These goals will be quantifiable and objectively verifiable.

Building Capacity

Based on the premise that mastitis is a multifactorial problem, and therefore best addressed by a multidisciplinary approach, *CellCheck* will develop the capacity of the various service provider groups – vets, farm advisers, dairy co-op milk quality advisers and milking machine technicians – to work collectively to provide solutions and support for dairy farmers.

Following initial engagement with service providers, *CellCheck* will empower farmers to take responsibility for mastitis management on their own farms.

Programme Evaluation

A process of continual evaluation is essential to ensure that *CellCheck* achieves the outcomes required by dairy farmers and the industry, and that it remains responsive to their changing needs (see section 7).



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Programme Documentation

AHI Strategy Document 2012 - 2014

The overall strategic direction of Animal Health Ireland and of the *CellCheck* programme is set out in the AHI Strategy (2012-14), available from the AHI website [[click here](#)].

CellCheck Business Plan

Agreed targets and performance metrics are built into the 2012 business plan, available from the AHI website.

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This present document, which is produced annually, provides AHI stakeholders and a wider audience with an introduction to the *CellCheck* programme and an overview of plans for the current year.

Communications Strategy

A detailed Communications Plan has been drawn up, setting out the high level communication goals of the programme, and the audiences, channels and communication objectives for each audience.

Stakeholder Communications

Stakeholders receive a formal annual report and informal quarterly reports.



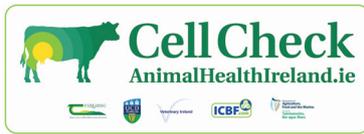
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4 Technical Resources

As with other AHI priority disease areas, *CellCheck* is supported by a technical working group (TWG). The role of the TWG is to collate leading international research, or to agree an expert consensus in the absence of such research. All TWG outputs are verified against peer and best practice review, thereby ensuring that all programme outputs are of the highest international standard, evidence-based and fit for purpose. The availability of respected, agreed and consistent technical information, as a basis for a range of consistent, high-quality resources for farmers and service providers, is key to the success of this programme

Chaired by Professor Simon More of CVERA, the TWG includes representatives from UCD, veterinary practice, Teagasc, industry and interest groups. In 2011, the group completed a critical review and adaptation of the *Countdown DownUnder* technical resource, providing the Irish industry with the *CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control*. This book is a collation of agreed science and best practice in relation to mastitis control, containing clear, consistent messages. The *Farm Guidelines* are intended to be a practical management and advisory tool for farmers and service providers alike.

In 2012, the TWG will steer the development of ancillary tools for farm use and advisory purposes, and will play an important role in the development and delivery of service provider training, which will be the focus of much activity in 2012.



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5 Planned Activities 2012

Communications and awareness

Generating a clear understanding of the benefits of improved mastitis control, and of the factors contributing to mastitis, are key aspects of the *CellCheck* programme. So too is identifying and ensuring access to effective mastitis control solutions. In 2012 the *CellCheck* programme will:

- Launch, and make available and promote to the dairy industry the CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control.
- Continue to collaborate with Teagasc on research into the economic benefits of mastitis control, both at producer and processor levels, including the development of related interactive tools to build awareness (e.g. SCC cost calculator).
- Host an international milk quality conference.
- Continue the redevelopment of the AHI website as an online resource containing information about the programme, as well as practical and technical information on mastitis control.

Disseminating best practice

The availability of respected, agreed and consistent technical information will be key to the success of this programme. Encouraging the adoption of best practices on-farm, and enabling service providers to engage with their farmers to focus on milk quality is an important step in the change process. In 2012 the *CellCheck* programme will:

- Continue to communicate monthly technical and programme messages through national press and stakeholder networks.
- Deliver farmer workshops, focused on key best practice messages, with the support and involvement of local service providers.
- Continue development of milk recording reporting solutions, to provide maximum support and value to the end-user.



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Setting goals

Having measurable, specific goals is important in providing focus and direction, and as a means to measure progress. While *CellCheck* can facilitate the agreement of such goals, ultimately the ability to implement change in order to achieve these goals lies with the wider industry. In 2012, *CellCheck* will have a role to play in this process by establishing national bulk milk SCC baseline figures, and subsequently facilitating and promoting industry agreement on appropriate SCC goals through continued engagement with the *CellCheck* Industry Consultation Group. In 2012, the *CellCheck* programme will:

- Establish protocols to enable collation of SCC information from dairy processors representing a majority of the total milk pool.
- Establish the national average bulk milk SCC baseline figures.
- Facilitate high-level industry discussion to enable agreement on long-term SCC targets.
- Explore opportunities to recognise current high quality producers; for example, by developing a *CellCheck* milk quality award.



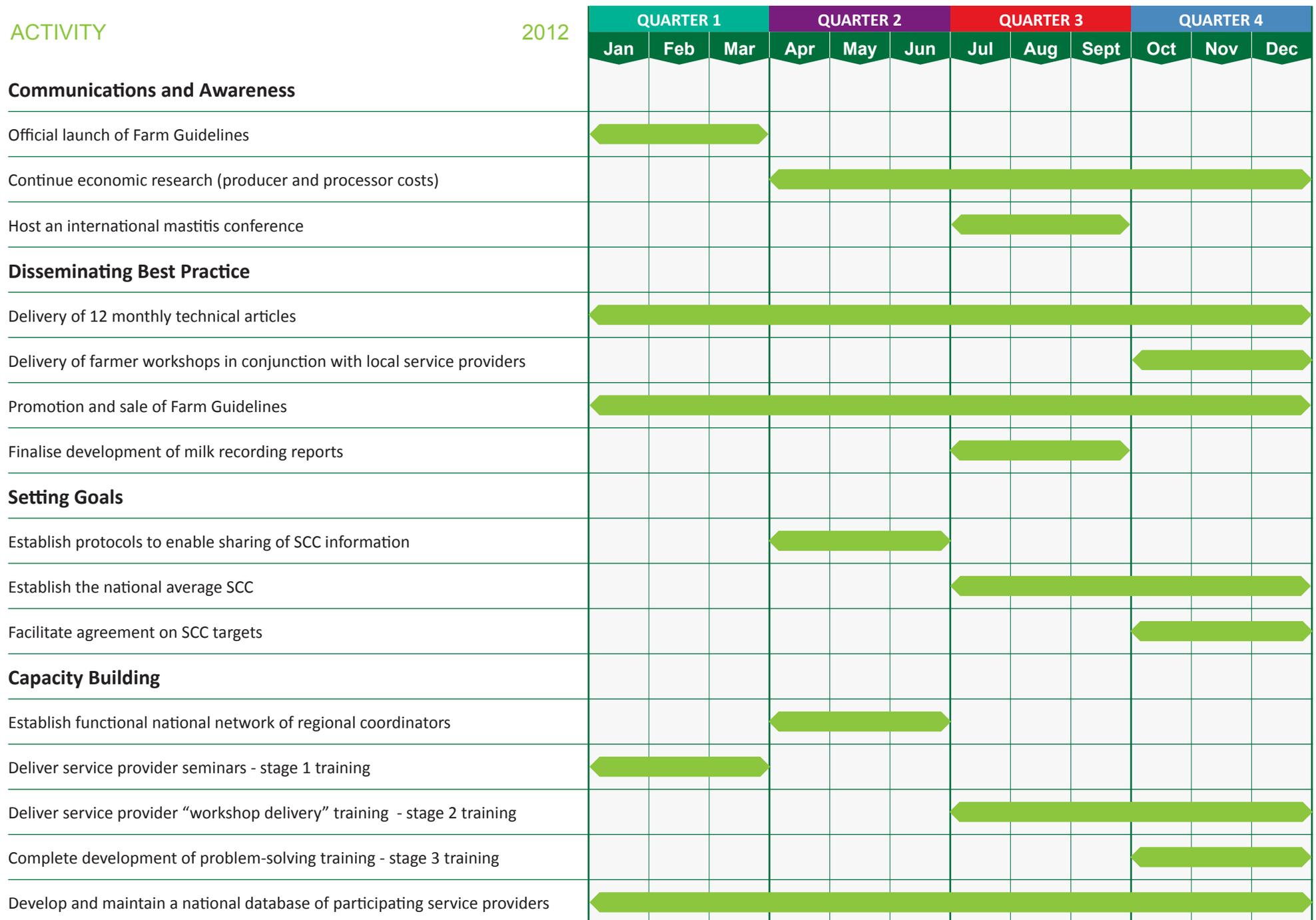
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Capacity building

Learning from both Irish and international experiences, *CellCheck* recognises that enabling the industry to work together to deliver mastitis control solutions is the most sustainable model. Increasing the number of people with capacity to deliver training and to support farmers is essential, and will require a step-wise approach. It is also important for milk suppliers to recognise the role that all disciplines can play in improving mastitis control. In 2012 the *CellCheck* programme will:

- Establish a network of regional co-ordinators.
- Deliver service-provider seminars, focused on building strong local networks, and reinforcing the messages contained in the *CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control*. (Stage 1 of service provider training).
- Engage with service providers, building a critical mass of people with the skills to deliver farmer workshops. (Stage 2 service provider training).
- Identifying and signposting currently active mastitis 'problem solvers'.
- Develop advanced problem-solving training for service providers. (Stage 3 training).
- Create and maintain a national database of participating service providers.

6 CellCheck Gantt Chart





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Programme Evaluation

Business Plan for the CellCheck Programme will be published on the AHI website and quarterly progress reports will be made available to Member organisations.

In addition, targeted social science research will provide a valuable means of on-going programme evaluation and refinement and an insight into the drivers and constraints to improving milk quality at industry and farm level.

Finally, structured participant feedback at all stages of engagement, both with service providers and farmers, will be used to actively refine and improve the programme.