



Arrabawn Quality Milk Supplier of the year 2020

Vincent & Conor O'Brien's story

Arrabawn Co Op decided to choose the O'Brien Family Farm in Kilmurry, Tynagh County Galway to represent the farmers of the Co Op in the NDC & Kerrygold Quality Milk Awards 2021. Vincent and Conor milk 130 high EBI Holstein Friesian cows assisted by full time worker Ivor Glennon. With Milk Quality on the farm excelling throughout the year, it was an obvious choice that the O'Brien's would represent Arrabawn in this competition. The Total Bacteria Count (TBC) and Somatic Cell Count (SCC) results proves for itself that the O'Brien's farm is a very well managed operation. TBC levels were continually below 20,000 with the exception of November. Similar can be said for the SCC results with only 2 months of the year peaking above 100,000. Thermoduric (THD) bacteria were also excellent throughout the year. The O'Brien's milk solids are also very promising, with an average protein % of 3.61, fat % of 4.50 and a lactose % of 4.72. Vincent & Conor aim to reach 550kg of Milk solids per cow in the coming years.

The O'Brien's recently invested in a modern milking parlour and cow drafting system to provide a more efficient and safe working environment and also to give themselves an improved quality of life. Conor, eldest son of Vincent and Mary, says it's like this, "if we didn't make the investment, it would not have been sustainable for us to continue farming with the facilities we had. There were not enough hours in the day for everything and my family was losing out. But this new parlour has changed everything, it is an investment in my family, my wife Orla and my three children Frank, Alex and Kate, as much as it is in the farm".

As recently as three years ago Conor returned home to farm full time with his father Vincent who has farmed in Kilmurry all his life. Prior to that Conor would have worked full time in Al Hayes Motors in Portumna. The acquisition of an adjacent farm in 2015 and 2016 facilitated increasing the herd numbers on the farm. The game changer for Conor and the O'Brien's has been the significant investment in a 24-unit milking parlour and ancillary services which was completed in early 2021.

The O'Brien's put a lot of thought and planning into the new milking parlour before considering what option was best suited to their farm. Vincent & Conor visited numerous farms and milking parlours across the country to investigate what was working well for fellow dairy farmers and nearly more importantly what they would do differently if they were to do it all again. The O'Brien's drew on a lot of expertise and advice from Arrabawn Co Op advisors, Teagasc advisors Tom Murphy and Michael Donohue (and Teagasc backup Specialists), Liam and Timmy Walsh from Portumna Farm & Dairy Services, as well as guidance from their local "Portumna" Dairy Discussion Group farming colleagues. Frank

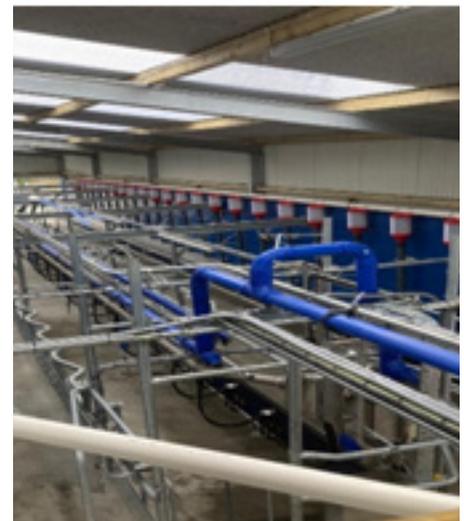


The O'Brien Family from Kilmurry, Tynagh County Galway, winners of the Arrabawn Quality Milk Supplier of the year award for 2020. From left Mary, Conor, Orla, Vincent and children Frank, Alex and Kate.

McGrath from AIB provided sound financial advice throughout the process. Aidan Kelly (Agri design & Planning services) in Clonmel played a vital role in the decision-making process around the location of the new greenfield site. Aidan visited the farm and picked out a few different possible sites. Aidan and the O'Brien's went through the pros and cons of each site one by one. Some were too far away from the winter accommodation and another site was too close to the dwelling house. The site that was settled on was not the preferred first choice, but through a process of elimination, it was decided that it ticked a lot of the boxes that were set out at the beginning. "I suppose it took us two years research and one year to build the facility" Conor recalls. The old 8-unit parlour was fine for a much smaller number of cows with cow flow being difficult for both farmer and animal. Very early on in the planning process the O'Brien's decided they would move to a green field site. The green field site gave the O'Brien's the comfort of upgrading to modern milking facilities with no restraints on collection yard size or capacity while also improving cow flow in the process. Extending the existing parlour would have interfered with the whole farmyard Conor stated. Although the financial costings would have been reduced by extending the existing parlour and facilities, Vincent & Conor feel the result would have been hugely compromised and would be the wrong decision in the long run.

The new setup is a combination of technology & labour efficient systems. From automatic cluster removers to a cluster-flush system. Another hugely innovative measure is the energy recovery system that sees the hot water in the parlour heated by the milk cooling process. "37 degrees was the hottest I got it to" Conor stated. If you can get your water up to that temperature without any additional

inputs there is a huge energy savings. This water is used in the parlour, and it feeds a three-phase water heater and the automatic washer for the machine. There is a plate cooler for the milk before it goes into the bulk tank and that water is then recycled for washing down the parlour. One of the biggest things for the O'Brien's is the washing of the parlour and the units. We put in a three phase washdown pump which is fed from a 10,000L storage tank which collects the rain water from the roof of the parlour. There is also a variable speed vacuum pump installed, so the vacuum only increases as the demand does. Also installed is an Alfco drafting system along with Cormac electronic button tags which allows for the sorting of cows as they exit the parlour from the keypad located in the pit. The cows are re-directed to a holding pen where they



can be put into a batch crush for scanning or AI.

The O'Brien's value milk recording as a key aspect to the profitability and sustainability of their farming system. Milk recording takes place five times per year on this farm. The first milk recording takes place very early on in the year, with three more spread out throughout late spring and summer before the last milk recording session occurring just before the cows are due to be dried off. The O'Brien's will also record cases of mastitis throughout the year and the affecting cows and quarters are also recorded. The gathering of all this valuable information allows Vincent & Conor to cull cows from the herd that are under performing or being problematic through the lactation. Conor states "the new system will help to protect heifers and cows from cross contamination, which will increase their survivability/longevity in the herd, leading to higher production and higher profits". It's early days yet but productivity on the farm

is set to increase year on year. Selective breeding and grassland management being the main drivers of this. It's all about the future for Conor and the O'Brien's. "I could have gotten away with a smaller parlour for sure but this is about future proofing the farm. I have capacity to expand if I want, too. The local (Portumna) Teagasc Dairy Discussion Group met here last week and the consensus was that we needed more cows. But you can't go too mad. You have to have balance in your life. This new parlour has enabled us to have a much better work life balance." Conor finished up by saying to get SCC under control, mind your heifers and stop the spread of mastitis - one thing leads to the other. The O'Brien's are one of four Arrabawn suppliers participating in the new Teagasc Signpost Farm programme over the next 5 years to provide learnings and research to fellow Arrabawn suppliers on the key steps of reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Carbon Footprint number on Irish farms.



The importance of changing your milk liners

Milk liners are made from complex rubber or silicone material and have a limited useful life. The majority of rubber liners are expected to last for 2,000 milkings or six months, whichever comes first. Milk liners lose elasticity over time and this change makes them less effective at fully milking out the cow, resulting in lower milk yield and leaving the cow more vulnerable to infection. Our recommendation is that liners should be changed when they have completed 2,000 milkings.

The milk liner is the only part of the milking machine that comes in direct contact with the cow so their condition is critical for mastitis control and an efficient milking process. Over time liners lose tension, absorb fat and hold bacteria. Rubber naturally deteriorates over time anyway, and this deterioration is enhanced with exposure to the cleaning products used for machine disinfection. This deterioration is sufficient to reduce the speed and completeness of milking while increasing teat end damage and the spread of mastitis bacteria. The interior of the liner can also become rough, making it more difficult to clean and disinfect allowing it to harbour bacteria, increasing the potential

of mastitis and cross-contamination between cows. The industry recommendation is to change liners after 2,000 milkings or 6 months, whichever comes first. Herds that have increased in size, with parlour size staying the same, sometimes forget that each cluster is milking more cows now than it might have a few years ago meaning that liners may need to be changed every 3 or 4 months.

To work out exactly when you should change your liners, simply complete the following calculation.

$$\frac{2,000 \times \text{Number of milking units}}{\text{Herd size} \times \text{Number of milkings per day}} = \text{Number of days in between liner changes}$$

For more information, see our short video on the Animal Health Ireland website - When Should I Change My Liners?

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Complete a fodder budget in July

Now is the time to have a look at your fodder requirements for next winter. Have you enough silage?

Difficult growing conditions, in May, in many parts of the country has resulted in lower-than-expected yields for June-cut silage. Many herds also have been grazing second-cut crops to hold grass on the farm. This could have implications for feed supply next winter. While there is plenty of time to catch up on building feed reserves, it is good practice to gauge the situation by

completing a provisional winter feed budget in July. This can be done in three simple steps:

1. measure silage pits (length x width x average height in metres) plus count bale stock;
2. make an estimate of potential second cut area and yield; and,
3. estimate likely stock numbers for the coming winter.

There are simple templates available to complete calculations on PastureBase (www.pbi.ie) and also on the Teagasc website. Your advisor is available to help with calculations

and to assess options. Having the numbers done early will result in better decisions made around feed purchases.

- 1. Measure silage pits and count bale stock.**
- 2. Estimate second-cut area and potential yield.**
- 3. Estimate likely stock numbers for next winter.**

Contact your local Arrabawn / Dan O'Connor Feeds representative to discuss options.

It's never too late to milk record!

When would you like to be finished calving next spring? All done by May 1? If so, then the bull needs to be out by July 25. However, the decision on when to remove the bull from the herd is as often based on whether a favourite cow repeats, as it is around any plan for next year.

What about those few extra empty 'good' cows that repeat in early August? Are these now worthless? No. Empty cull cows milked on can produce 20 to 25% of their lactation after December 1 (depending on their calving date) and will also gain significant carcass weight if fed correctly, 'fattening while milking'. Finished off grass in early May, empty culls fed well and milked through the winter will probably earn at least as much as if bred to calve again in May.

Once you have sufficient replacements coming along to meet the target number of stock to calve next year, growing your herd with late-calving cows will not add to the bottom line. On the contrary, it will complicate calving, calf rearing and breeding seasons next year.

Once July begins, the countdown to the end of the breeding season has begun. For many a finish date of July 25 will result in an end of April calving season. Isn't that late enough?

- All milk recording services are now back in action. If you didn't get started yet (due to Covid-19) and are tempted to leave it until next year...don't! It is never too late in the year to start milk recording and gathering individual cow information.
- Research has shown that milk recording will lead to a €120 increase in profit per cow, or a ten-fold return on the typical annual cost of the service. There may be



a bit of work involved in milk recording, but the returns (provided you use the information generated) are well worth it.

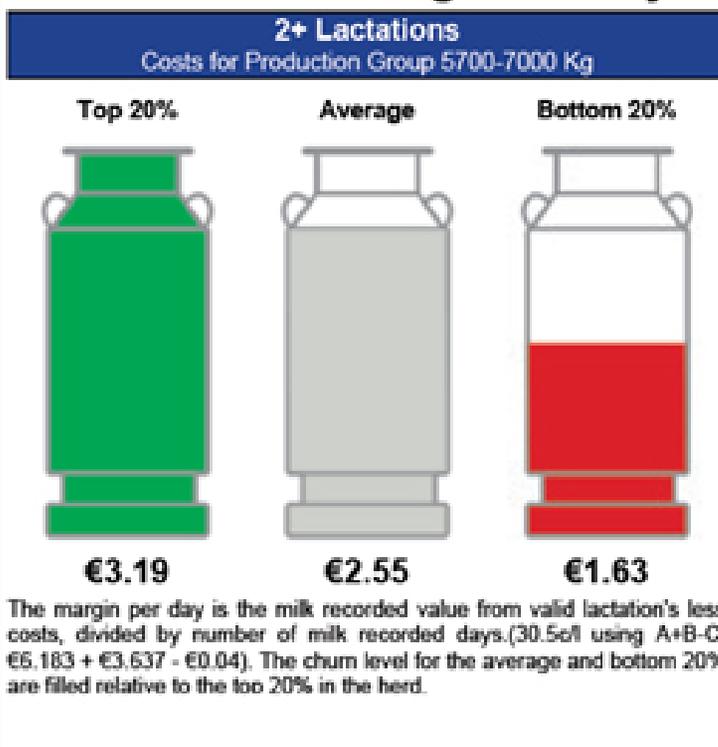
- Use the CellCheck Farm Summary Report, provided after each recording, to make informed decisions about mastitis control in your herd.
- Track your best and worst performing cows; in 2021 it

might be important to be able to identify 'passenger' cows, especially if you are tight on grass and/or winter feed.

■ New regulations around dry cow therapy are expected in 2022, increasing the requirement for milk recording by more herds. Why not start in 2021, and build up valuable information before then?

- ✓ **The new lifetime margin per day calculation** in this report is an extremely accurate and fair method of ranking cows within your herd. It gives a cow a cost of production for each lactation dependant on the month of calving and also takes the days dry into account.
- ✓ The production summary allows you to benchmark your herd against the top 20% of milk recorded herds for each metric in the last two weeks. The margin per day churns is a great visual way of comparing the average cow and the bottom 20% of cows to the top 20%.
- ✓ In the main report itself, every animal gets a within herd rank based on their lifetime margin per day. The top 20% and bottom 20% are coloured in green and red respectively. This information is vital when making decisions on which cows you want to breed replacements from and which cows you do not want to retain in the herd next year. The information in the report also allows you analyse why a cow is performing poorly – Is she spending too long dry or is it genetics like a low production subindex.
- ✓ Controlling SCC is becoming increasing more important as we want to minimise needless culling for high cell count and reduce our antibiotic usage. The colour coded grouping of cows based on their infection history into recently infected (orange), persistently infected (red), recently cured (blue) and healthy (green) allows for straight forward interpretation. This in turn leads to solid decisions being made around milking routine, cows or quarters to dry off and which cows need treatment and which cows should not be treated.

Milk Recorded Margin Per Day



Production Summary

	Your Herd Av per cow	Top 20% MR Herds
Number of Cows	95	
Average days in milk	136	
Milk Kg	19.5	27.2
Milk Gal	4.2	5.8
Fat Kg	0.9	1.06
Protein Kg	0.76	0.96
Total Solids	1.66	2.01
Fat %	4.59	4.18
Protein %	3.88	3.64
Average SCC	86	96
% cows 200,000+ SCC	9	6

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Dock control in grassland

There is an opportunity now to get rid of weeds in grazing swards and benefit from improved animal performance for the rest of the grazing season and beyond.

Many weed-infested silage swards that were not treated before the first cut silage due to the cold harsh weather during late April and early May this season. Many of these fields are now coming to the right stage for treatment with a translocated herbicide. The ideal time to spray is three to four weeks after the silage is cut when weeds such as docks, thistles, nettles, and buttercups are at the right stage for a good kill.

The same applies to permanent pasture which has been topped in recent weeks. Where pasture infested with weeds such as docks or thistles has not been topped, the best approach is to top it over the next couple of weeks and wait for three to four weeks regrowth before applying a translocated herbicide.

Timing

Timing of the spray has a big bearing on

the level of long term control. Weeds should be actively growing and be at the correct stage for the most effective kill.

- Docks should be 15-25cm (6-10ins) high or across and before a seed head begins to show.
- Thistles should have four to 10 leaves and be 15-25cm high.

"If weeds have gone past this stage in aftergrass or permanent pasture, it is best to top them and wait for three to four weeks before spraying," advised weed control specialist Michael Ryan.

"There will be plenty of opportunities to spray with products such as **DoxstarPro**, **Thistlex** and **Forefront T** over the coming weeks and months. These herbicides can generally be used right up until the end of September and into October if growth is good. The key to success is in choosing the right product and spraying at the right time that gives the most effective kill," said Michael, who is Grassland Specialist with Whelehan Crop Protection.

Use DoxstarPro on docks

Where docks are the dominant weed, DoxstarPro is the proven solution. It is proven in research and on countless farms to deliver long term control of docks. It is a translocated herbicide which means that you are assured that the chemical gets right down to the root system which can be up to a metre long.

Docks have an enormous impact on grass dry matter output and sward productivity. Independent research has shown that just one dock/35 sq. metres results in a loss of one per cent in grass dry matter.

An infestation of 50 docks or more/35 sq. metres is far from uncommon, leading to a massive reduction in grass production. The benefits of spraying with DoxstarPro are undisputed.

Dosing Cattle this summer Maximise production, minimise resistance

Worm burdens in animals at pasture are an inevitable fact of farming in Ireland. As temperatures increase, the time for worm eggs to develop into infective larvae shortens and when we move into June and July, there is an abundance of larvae on pasture. Choosing the right product and getting the most from it are key factors in ensuring optimum livestock performance and reducing the risk of anthelmintic resistance.

Worming is essential to break the life cycle of gut and stomach worms where cattle are grazing infected pastures. Treatments should aim to limit disease and minimise pasture contamination.

1. Only dose when required. Either from experience and knowledge of the grazing patterns and/or use freshly taken dung samples for faecal egg counts
2. Use the correct amount of product to treat the heaviest in the group
3. Check how long the product kills worms



e.g. Dectomax and Cydectin injections kill hoose and stomach worms for 5 weeks giving a dosing interval of 8 weeks.

Hoos (lungworm) is a complication in cattle. The best on farm test for lungworm are the farmer's own ears! Affected



cattle should be treated as soon as possible. The low infection threshold for disease and the potential for rapid increase of infective larvae on pastures, means that outbreaks are unpredictable. Consequently, the use of clean grazing strategies is less reliable than for other roundworm species.

Forefront T the ideal Broad-Spectrum spray

Forefront T is the most effective broad-spectrum herbicide a farmer can use on grazing swards. As well as dealing with docks, thistles, nettles, chickweed, dandelions and buttercups, it is also highly effective on ragwort.

Where a combination of these weeds exist in swards following a silage or hay crop or in permanent pasture, **Forefront T** is the best option for cleaning them out. A growing number of farmers are now choosing it as the ideal broad-spectrum spray.



Summer Scour Syndrome

“Summer Scour Syndrome” is the latest disease to hit young calves grazing. But what is it and how can it be prevented? Here are some simple tips to understand and prevent this disease in your herd. The disease is becoming more prevalent in Irish Herds in recent years.

When: Usually occurs in calves a month or two at grass after weaning or a sudden change in diet- moving from older/stemmy grass to large volumes of green/lush grass. (flush of grass after drought)

Signs: Ill-thrift, scour (watery-brown), losing weight and going backwards. They may seem very empty, hunched back and dull brown coats. It doesn't seem to be contagious, but a whole group can suffer from scour. Sometimes ulcers can be seen in their mouth from acid production and lack of rumination. However, care must be taken to observe for other clinical diseases such as coccidiosis, worms etc. as the calves will be more susceptible to picking up a secondary disease.



Why: Diet is the main influencing factor. The rumen takes a couple months to develop fully and is a very sensitive to sudden changes in diet. The bacteria in the rumen take about 2 weeks to adjust to a new diet. Spring grass is high in oils (CLA- conjugated linoleic acid), which can be quite difficult to digest and adapt to. When the bacteria are disrupted a change in stomach pH and fermentation occurs in the rumen, causing gas and further acidosis. Spring and green grass is often low in fibre which is key in supporting good rumen health.

How to Prevent:

1. If feeding a large volume of concentrates, split the feed in two. If eating large volume of concentrate at once, a calf will feel very full for a couple hours. Then eat a large volume of grass later in day. If grass is leafy this can create acidosis, causing scour. Ideally split large volumes of concentrates in two to encourage an even grass intake throughout the day.
2. Provide roughage- Clean straw, hay/haylage or a field with stemmy/older pastures. Roughage encourages chewing, creating saliva which works as an antacid, also roughage is slowly broken down encourage correct rumen function and development.
3. Stemmy older pastures provide good levels of roughage for calves. Avoid low covers of lush grass for 8-10 weeks.
4. High starch feed should be avoided in affected calves.
5. Provide mineral licks to avoid mineral deficiencies in particular copper.
6. Does a Faecal test for worms to check worm burden or coccidiosis. Ruling out a secondary disease/
7. Buffers such as RumBuff can be added to feed to counteract acid production, can complement fibre in the diet nicely (such as hay/straw).
8. Very badly affected calves should be brought back indoors and feed milk and bland diet of hay and small amount concentrates.
9. Avoid abrupt weaning, allow rumen and digestive tract to adjust to new diet gradually.

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