Milk Supply
Milk supply for February was 4.4 million litres which was a decrease of 5.25% on the same month last year. March supply to date is up by 9%.

Milk Price
Milk price for February has been increased by 1.5 cent per litre. This brings the February price to 33.39 cent per litre including SCC bonus and VAT at standard constituents.

The average prices paid for the month, based on the average constituents of 4.14% butterfat and 3.31% protein, are as follows:
- Variable = 35.67
- Fixed Milk Price 1 = 35.34
- Fixed Milk Price 2 = 32.66
- Fixed Milk Price 3 = 33.14

Dairy Markets
Dairy markets have been much weaker with the past month across all commodities. This has been led by a sharp fall in milk powders. Sluggish demand and some recovery in output are the main reasons. In the case of skim milk powder the large intervention stock in Europe overhangs the market while poor Chinese demand and low oil prices are hitting the price of Whole Milk Powder. Butter and cheese prices have also moved lower in the past month across all markets. European milk supply over the next few months will have a large bearing on where prices go from here. Most analysts are predicting a difficult second half of the year.

The California Mastitis Test (CMT) is a quick and easy ‘cow-side’ test that is useful for detecting subclinical mastitis by estimating the SCC of the milk.

The test works on the principle that mixing milk with a reagent causes the somatic cells in the milk to rupture. When the DNA is released from these cells, it coagulates and forms slime—the more cells there are in the milk, the more “jelly-like” the result!

It is good practice to check all cows and 1st lactation animals with the CMT before including their milk in the bulk tank for the first time—that way you can be confident that any problem cows are picked up early, before they cause more trouble.

3 easy steps:
1. After discarding the first 3-4 squirts of foremilk, collect 2-3 squirts of milk from each quarter in each separate well.
2. Add an equal amount of reagent to each well. Swirl the paddle gently, mixing for 10 secs.
3. Look at the consistency of the fluid in each well (not the colour), and record the amount of gel reaction that occurs within 20 seconds (from none to almost solidified).

CMT kits are available from most co-op retail stores and veterinary clinics and are very inexpensive. Replacement bottles of reagent can be purchased separately. This is one of the best investments to make in your dairy-go get one and start practising!

What do the results mean?
- Results are generally categorised as follows: negative, trace, 1, 2, 3.
- This test is subjective! i.e. what you score as 1, your neighbour might score as a 2.
- Remember—the important thing is that any positive reaction (1,2 or 3) indicates a high SCC in that quarter.
- To become accurate and consistent, practice on cows with a known high SCC.

Early identification of mastitis gives you the best chance of cure, and of preventing persistent problems. Clinical cases will have obvious signs, such as clots in the milk or a swollen quarter, but what about the subclinical cases? These have no signs at all, other than a high somatic cell count (SCC).
10 Benefits to be Gained from Milk Recording

As we enter the era of precision agriculture, performance data and how we use it has never been of more importance. For the Irish dairy farmer the most important piece of performance data that can be collected is milk yield and quality results. As milk price projections are giving a more positive outlook for 2017, it is expected that dairy farmers may have more capital to invest in the long term profitability of their herds, through resuming or even entering milk recording for the first time.

The most obvious benefit of milk recording is that it allows the farmer to track their best and worst producers. This allows the farmer to make management decisions such as; which cows are underperforming and may be suitable to cull or, which cows are producing in your system and are more suitable for breeding replacements.

Regular milk recording will also allow the herd owner to keep track of the somatic cell count (SCC) of each cow. This will identify and facilitate the management of repeat offenders and could dramatically decrease your herds overall SCC and improve milk price.

Herd that milk recording get a CellCheck Farm Summary Report after each recording-this report highlights the areas of excellence in terms of mastitis control, and also areas that could be improved. It quantifies the daily loss occurring as a result of high SCC cows, so the herd owner can clearly see what can be gained financially from preventing infection.

Milk recording adds significant value to any surplus breeding stock being sold off farm and increases the chances of a bull calf being selected to enter AI through the Gene Ireland programme.

Milk recording results are fed into ICBF’s genetic evaluations. This allows us to give your cows an EBI with a higher reliability. Herds that are milk recording also get access to high EBI young bulls through the Gene Ireland programme. Getting these bulls tested in herds that are milk recording allows ICBF to prove these bulls in a shorter period of time, thereby increasing the speed of genetic gain.

In autumn 2017, ICBF plans to launch a new culling tool known as ‘Cows Own Worth’ or COW. This will rank cows on their expected profit potential for the rest of their lifetime. The COW will take into account the environmental aspects such as; calving date, age, milk recording results, health events, etc. The COW will act as a guide in choosing which cows to cull from your herd; and will only be available for herds that are milk recording.

Cost effective pregnancy diagnosis is now possible through milk samples. This service will indicate if a cow is in calf or not.

Milk recording data provided the phenotypic (on the ground) data that has allowed ICBF to launch genomic evaluations for the Holstein/Friesian breed. In time more milk records for crossbreds will enable ICBF to launch genomics for crossbreds.