

## **Intensity of Agricultural Contractors Usage on Suckler Beef Farms in Ireland**

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Agricultural contractors have an important support role on suckler beef farms. Data to quantify the usage of agricultural contractors were collected for 115 spring calving suckler farms over a 12 month period. Each month the participating farmers completed a questionnaire documenting the type and duration of contractor usage. A total of 616 suckler beef enterprise related contractor tasks were identified over the 12 month period. The tasks were forage conservation, manure handling, land maintenance, building maintenance, fencing, hedge-cutting, fertiliser spreading and animal husbandry. Results from the study show that contractors were employed for a total of 11,719 hrs. Contractors were used for 5,983 hrs on forage conservation attending 98 farms (197 tasks) with a mean of 2.0 visits per farm and a duration of 30.4 man hours per visit. The corresponding values for manure handling were 1736, 66 (169), 2.6 and 10.3, for land maintenance were 1613, 38 (56), 1.5 and 28.8, for building maintenance 1026, 18 (34), 1.9 and 30.2, for hedge cutting 458, 34 (46), 1.4 and 10.0, for fertiliser spreading 104, 17 (24), 1.4 and 4.3 and for husbandry 419, 22 (67), 3.0 and 6.3 respectively. Forage conservation and manure handling accounted for 51% and 15% of all contractor time respectively, in contrast to hedge cutting and fertiliser spreading which accounted for 4% and 1% respectively. This study shows the considerable dependence of the suckler beef farms on agricultural contractors and the critical need for forward planning so that tasks can be efficiently undertaken.

**Keywords:** contractors, farms, suckler beef, tasks