

DAIRY

July 2025

July top five tips

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Keep focused on grass – continue to walk your farm.

1. Are your milk liners due a change? Milking machine liners should be changed every six months or after 2,000 milkings (whichever comes first). If milking six rows or more, you will reach 2,000 milkings in less than six months.
2. Complete a winter fodder budget: there is plenty of silage on most farms, but many first cuts were lighter than normal this year. It is important to complete a budget to assess feed stocks for the coming winter. Identifying an issue early will leave you more options to rectify the situation.
3. Keep focused on grass: continue to walk the farm regularly to assess grass availability and quality. Target pre-grazing yield at 1,300-1,400kg DM/ha. Maximising grass quality in



MILKING MACHINE

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front of the herd will maximise yield and allow for savings in concentrate usage. Take opportunities now to correct quality issues before starting to build grass next month.

4. End the breeding season: cows bred in July will not be calving until mid to late April next year. Late-calving cows are less profitable – assess this year's calving

pattern and minimise the tail on next year's calving season by sticking to your planned end of breeding season date.

5. Think safety: July is one of the most dangerous months of the year on farm. Make safety a priority, with special attention to child safety during the school holiday period.

Tidy up sward quality

Grass growth in June was variable on many farms, leading to some heavy covers being grazed over the last few weeks. This has resulted in some high post-grazing residuals and poor grass quality in paddocks. July is the month to fix any issues with sward quality before we start building grass supply in August. Every effort must be made to improve sward clean-out by the herd. Mechanical correction may be necessary to achieve proper sward clean-out.



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Ideally, this should be done by taking out surplus grass as bales from paddocks with heavy covers or poor quality.

Potash needs to be returned after bales

The capability of grass to grow starts below the surface. If the major elements of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are compromised, less grass will be grown. A lot of soils are Index 1 or 2 for K and therefore deficient. This is particularly true of silage ground; however, it is now becoming more common on the grazing area. There are three reasons for this:

1. Not enough compound fertiliser is being spread.

2. Swards harvested for bales (surplus grass) are removing K (every four bales/ac removes about 24 units of K).
3. Soils deficient in lime will 'lock-up' K in the soil.

However, there are no regulatory limits on the quantity (or timing) of K application. There are now many fertiliser products available that have nitrogen (N), K and sulphur (S) with no P (e.g., 29:0:15+S) that will help replenish K.

Plan for long-term return on investment

With money hard earned and never guaranteed on dairy farms, give careful consideration before re-investing profits. There are always more ways to spend money than there is money available, and every option has its pros and cons. Key questions to ask before you invest are:

- Am I investing or am I spending?
Investing gives a return and benefits. Spending uses up cash and often creates future costs for no real return.
- Would I be willing to borrow to make the same investment in a lower margin year? If not, ask whether the decision is being made based on current cash situation and not actual need.
- Am I spending just to reduce a tax liability? This is rarely, if ever, an efficient use of farm profits.
- What is the best alternative that I am giving up by making this choice? Would it give a better return over time?
- Are there other means of solving the issue on farm that haven't been properly implemented?

- Will the investment materially change herd productivity and/or labour efficiency?
- Will it result in higher future costs, e.g., maintenance?
- What will be the residual value of the investment?

Plan carefully for the remainder of the year and invest with strategic goals in mind. Capital allowances can make necessary investments more feasible but should not be an end in themselves. Explore long-term tax planning options with your financial advisor. With high milk prices in 2022, 73% of new investment was on new machinery and vehicles. The 'shine' wore off quickly in 2023. Investing in reseeding, roadways, water and fencing, lime, slurry storage, calf facilities, auto heat detection and drafting are all relatively high return options. Even farmyard lighting, yard surface gates and guttering would make a big difference to the workplace for next winter.

Children farm safety webinar



With children home from school, they are particularly vulnerable to dangers on the farm, like vehicles, livestock, and slurry pits. Children must be supervised at all times when they are on a farm. Teagasc recently produced an informative farm safety webinar for children, 'Stay safe with Jessie', which featured Agrikids. Jessie is the Teagasc farm safety mascot. Take time to show this to the young people in your life. Available through the QR code here or at: <https://surl.li/hnxdzk>.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Taking stock of winter feed

It has been a decent year for forage. Silage season was completed earlier than usual and second cuts have had a good period of growth. Taking first cuts in May should ensure that second cuts can be completed by mid to late July. It is a great chance to build some silage reserves. The target is to have a rolling surplus of 400-600kg DM per cow (two to three bales) on hand above normal requirements. On many farms, there will be an opportunity to take a third cut without impairing autumn grass availability.

While grazing conditions were exceptional in spring, grass availability was a challenge for most farms and this highlights the importance of ensuring that there is sufficient high-quality forage (74 DMD+) reserved to support early lactating dairy cows until growth meets demand on farm. Fill out **Table 1** to determine the winter feed requirements for your herd and determine if the level of feed stocks on hand are sufficient. Timely assessment will give you the opportunity to identify the quality of the forage currently in the yard, and determine



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where you are relative to target. Bear in mind that dry cow forage (target 68 DMD) makes up on average 10-12 weeks of the winter feed budget, and the remaining feed required for the milking herd and replacements should be a minimum of 72 DMD.

To assess existing feed stocks we can assume that each bale of silage is approx. 0.2t DM, while every m³ of pit silage can be converted to t DM using the following conversions:

- 20% DM x 0.15;
- 25% DM x 0.17; and,
- 30% DM x 0.18.

Table 1: Winter feed requirements calculator.

Fodder budget	Stock no.	Months	Ton DM/month	Total t DM (stock no. x months x ton DM/required)
Dairy cows			0.4	
2 year+			0.4	
1-2 year			0.33	
0-1 year			0.18	
Total				