

# DAIRY

November 2024

## Top tips for November

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*Avoid the temptation to regrazed areas already closed.*

1. Start drying off heifers in early November. Heifers are still growing and require more days in the dry period. Give heifers a minimum of 12 weeks dry. Discuss selective dry cow therapy options with your vet.
2. Plan grazing based on spring demand. It's tempting to keep going if ground conditions are dry, but grass will be more valuable when cows are freshly calved.
3. Calving is less than 90 days away! Organise who is going to help you in spring. Who might be interested locally? If you



**ABOUT  
900-  
1,000<sub>KG DM/HA</sub>**

**is required in grass  
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on most farms.**

only have one person and this person gets sick, injured or does not work out, you are on your own. Word of mouth is important, so ask around.

4. Establish a good winter work routine early. Can you simplify jobs like cleaning cubicles? Are lights, drinkers and scrapers all in good working order, etc.? With cows in late lactation in spring herds, can you

milk an hour earlier in the evening? There will be enough long days in spring.

5. Weigh young stock before housing. If you don't have a scale you can hire one from your local mart. Don't assume they are on target. Many farmers have got caught out by thinking they are when some of them are not. Group and feed based on weight.

## Know when to call time on grazing

Demand for grass in early spring is now much greater due to more compact calving and increased dairy cow intakes. About 900-1,000kg DM/ha is required in grass supply on February 1 on most farms.

The biggest factor influencing grass availability in early spring is the closing-up strategy in autumn. To reach this target, an average farm cover (AFC) of 700-750kg DM/ha is required on December 1. This assumes growth rates of about 4kg DM/ha per day during December and January. Therefore, the grazing season must finish on most farms in early November, with an



*Grazing late into November will delay closing.*

AFC of about 550-600kg DM/ha. Grazing late into November will delay closing and reduce early spring grass supply if the farm cover goes below 600kg DM/ha.

## Be winter ready

It is very important to think about how severe weather might impact your work and take action to mitigate this. The Irish Government's Be Winter Ready campaign focuses on helpful ways to minimise disruption to farming activities during severe weather events.

During severe weather, tasks like milking, provision of feed and water to livestock,

delivery of feed to the farm or products from the farm, can become very difficult. Planning and preparation will help to minimise disruption. For more information visit: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9e1358-preparing-your-business-for-severe-weather-stay-winter-ready/>.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

# Hygiene at dry off procedure

A recent study completed in Teagasc Moorepark looked at the procedure used at dry off and its impact on the somatic cell count (SCC) in the subsequent lactation, using both antibiotic and teat sealer (AB + TS) and teat sealer (TS) only. All the cows on the study had an SCC of <100,000 at the time of drying off. The cows were divided into four groups and dried off using either the guidelines-based procedure or standard procedure (Table 1). Where higher levels of hygiene were adhered to at drying off, the results were significantly better with TS only (Figure 1). The impact of the antibiotic at ‘masking’ poor dry off technique is notable. This study clearly demonstrates that in the absence of antibiotic dry cow therapy, hygiene at drying off needs to be

significantly better than may be the case. It highlights that when done correctly, TS only for healthy cows has no impact on their SCC in the subsequent lactation. Consult your vet and advisor for more information on selective drying off.

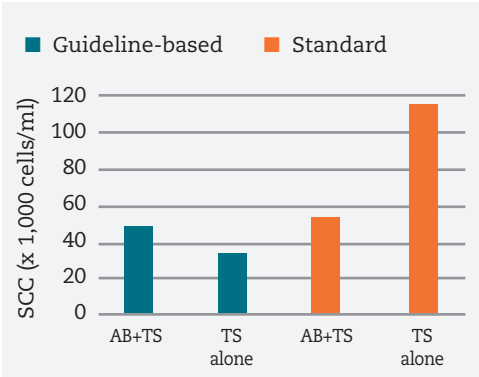


FIGURE 1: Following the guidelines-based procedure at dry off reduces SCC.

Table 1: Drying off standard procedure and guidelines-based procedure.

Step	Standard procedure	Guidelines-based procedure
1	Clip tails and udders before drying off	Clip tails and udders before drying off
2	-	New clean gloves for each animal
3	Teat dip (30 seconds plus dry)	Teat dip (30 seconds plus dry)
4	-	Disinfect with cotton wool and methylated spirits
5	Disinfect with alcohol wipes until clean	Disinfect with alcohol wipes until clean
6	Partially insert tube nozzle	Partially insert tube nozzle
7	Massage udder	Massage without touching teat end
8	-	Pinch teat base while infusing sealant
9	Leave some teat sealant visible at teat end	Leave some teat sealant visible at teat end
10	-	Apply teat disinfectant

## Put winter feed plans into action

Winter fodder supply is tight on many farms. A small deficit now could turn into a big problem in spring, depending on weather.

It may be simplest to keep feeding silage to the herd *ad lib* and just buy more, but secure any silage you need now. If good quality silage (70 DMD+) is available, this is the simplest solution. However, poor quality silage (<64 DMD) will require 2-3kg concentrates to achieve a dry cow diet standard, adding to cost.

If sourcing silage is not an option, you could restrict silage and supplement with concentrate. Teagasc trials have shown no



Buying additional silage may be the simplest solution to a fodder shortage.

effect on cow condition or calving difficulty where cows were offered 8kg DM of silage plus 3.5kg concentrate. Failure to restrict silage access will result in cows becoming over-conditioned. Enough space for all cows to eat at the same time is needed.

## National Dairy Conference

The Teagasc National Dairy Conference heads for Limerick Racecourse on November 27. The theme is 'Robust dairy farming for future challenges'. After a tough year, some optimism has returned. However, long-term challenges need to be addressed.

The conference will examine boosting pasture productivity, managing difficult spring conditions, a deep dive on protected urea, and dairy farmers' role in protecting

water quality. We will hear from a mix of researchers, advisors and leading farmers. The afternoon will run in practical workshop format, which has proven very popular. Topics include TB trends, managing cash costs, and a review of clover experience on commercial farms. We look forward to seeing you there. Booking and programme details are available on the Teagasc website or by scanning the QR code below.

## National Dairy Conference

'Robust dairy farming for future challenges'

27 November | 9am | Limerick Racecourse



