

DAIRY

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Top five tips for October

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It's time to start planning closing up for winter.

- Plan your autumn closing grazing. Covers are generally lower this autumn due to less growth and some farmers may have the temptation to continue to graze to save silage, but this grass will have more benefit in the spring with fresh-calved cows. Close enough ground early enough to have grass available in the spring. Target 60% closed by November 1 (70% on heavier ground).
- Arrange a milk recording for your herd at the latest 45 days out from drying out to help identify cows that may have somatic cell count (SCC) issues, and more importantly, to select cows that are suitable for sealer only. Selective dry



TARGET
60%

of the grazing
area closed by
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cow therapy should only be used where the cow is suitable and the conditions in the cubicle shed are also.

- Body condition score (BCS) your herd. Identify cows in poor condition that would benefit from a longer dry period. Drying cows off earlier will give them a better chance of achieving target BCS 3.25 at calving.
- While we move into the quieter time of year, we should still keep an eye on the calving season around the corner. Ensure all sheds are cleaned and ready

to go. Check the floor space you have available for your calves. Ideally each calf would have a minimum of 1.8m² lying area. If you don't have this, can you create extra calf accommodation by converting a shed or using temporary structures to increase your capacity during calving?

- Check your dairy wash storage requirements for the coming winter with your advisor. You will require 31 days of dairy washing storage as the closed period for this will be for all of December.

Grazing objectives for October

- This September saw a huge range in on-farm grazing situations, from almost ideal autumn grazing in parts of the north/midlands, to severe drought conditions in parts of the south and east. This means that farms are starting into October in very different circumstances in terms of average farm cover (AFC).
- Nonetheless, there are two objectives for autumn grazing management that we should try to balance in the coming weeks. The first is to keep grass in the diet of the dairy cow for as long as possible, as grazed grass is the lowest cost feed available. Grazed grass also supports the highest milk composition (fat % and protein %). The second objective is to close up the farm in time to ensure adequate grass availability next spring. It will be difficult to achieve both for many farms this year, and where this is the case, the priority should be closing in time for spring.



Grazing conditions have varied across the country.

- The closing AFC target is 750kg DM/ha on December 1. To achieve this target, closing up the farm should begin in early October (around October 7). The farm is then closed on rotation during October, with a minimum of 60% closed by November 1 (or 70% on heavier soils). Where herd demand is higher in the spring, these farms should have 75% of the farm closed.
- Paddocks that are to be grazed during February should ideally be closed between mid October and November 1.

This enables these paddocks to have a medium cover of grass (700-1,000kg DM/ha) available during February. This grass is easily grazed and helps achieve the target of 30% grazed by early March.

Paddocks with reasonable clover content should be closed during the last week of October. This will enable light to get to the base of the sward and thereby, improve clover content for next year.

Testing for antibiotic identification

With a 12-week dry period recommended for first lactation cows, early-calved first calvers that are due around February 1 again in 2025 need to finish their 2024 lactation in late October/early November. Consequently, teat sealers and the right dry cow antibiotic (where required) will need to be prescribed and bought in time.

Milk culturing is a process whereby a lab grows the bacteria in the samples you have submitted and assesses the colonies that form to identify the causative agents (*Staph. aureus*, *Strep. uberis* or *Strep. agalactiae*, etc.). Sensitivity analysis, which examines the resistance or susceptibility of the cultured bacteria to a list of antibiotics is the final step to help identify the appropriate treatment for your cows that require antibiotic treatment.

Correct sampling technique

The sampling technique is critical for successful outcomes from culture and sensitivity sampling, as bacteria from the environment, such as your hands or dirt from the cow's udders or teats, can



Have all you need for drying off bought in advance.

contaminate the sample, which makes it useless for culture and sensitivity testing. This is a major source of frustration for farmers, so follow these steps:

- clean, disinfect and dry teats;
- use disposable gloves and sterile sampling bottles;
- keep the sample bottle capped until you are ready to take the sample;
- draw the milk into the sample bottle holding it at a 45° angle to avoid any debris from the udder ending up in the bottle;
- refrigerate at 4°C or freeze if necessary; and,
- visit Animal Health Ireland Successful Culture and Sensitivity Sampling for a more detailed description of how to take a sterile sample.

Date for your diary

The 2024 Teagasc National Dairy Conference will take place on November 27 in Limerick Racecourse. Topics will include discussion on future dairy systems and stocking rates,

as well as practical workshops on controlling costs, breeding technologies and herd nutrition. Details will be on the Teagasc website in the coming days.

September due to lower than target grass covers, so there is concern that deficits will increase for some before the normal winter housing date. While forage stocks are tight in some areas, there appears to be feed available to purchase locally for most. Prices for straight energy feeds (cereal/hulls/pulps, etc.) have moderated and offer reasonable value. Farms with larger deficits should begin to remove empty culls and high-SCC cows now.

Enterprise	Region	Sufficient	<10% deficit	10-20% deficit	20%+ deficit
Dairy	National	58%	23%	13%	6%
Dairy	Midlands/North East	55%	28%	12%	5%
Dairy	North West	61%	17%	15%	7%
Dairy	South East	64%	26%	5%	5%
Dairy	South	55%	24%	15%	6%

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