

DAIRY

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Top five tips for January

EDITED BY
JOE PATTON,
HEAD OF DAIRY
KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER



Feeding the correct rate of minerals is very important.

1. Are you feeding the correct rate of pre-calving minerals? Check the bag for correct feed rate and ensure a sufficient amount is being fed. At a 125g/cow/day feeding rate a 25kg bag will be used every two days per 100 cows.
2. Prepare for calving – ensure all calving and calf-rearing facilities and equipment are ready, with ample supplies of consumables such as calf tags, gloves, iodine, and lubricant available. Put a system in place where everything has a specific storage location so items can be quickly found when needed.
3. Prepare for grazing – ensure paddocks are ready for grazing. Inspect all fencing and water troughs and repair where



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necessary. A good supply of temporary posts and fence reels will be invaluable when starting grazing.

4. Prepare for milking – get milking machine serviced and tested. All rubberware should be inspected for signs of damage and natural ageing. A new set of liners should be fitted to start the season.

5. Are you vaccinating for calf scour this year? Ensure vaccine is administered at an appropriate time pre calving. Where there is a long calving season it may be necessary to stagger the vaccination of early- and late-calving cows to ensure optimal timing.

Early slurry application

The impact of lower fertiliser allowances on pasture growth can be at least partially offset by making more and better use of slurry. Getting the application rate right is very important to maximise the contribution slurry can make to the nutrient application strategy. Once the closed period for slurry application is over (double-check the dates for your own location), farmers should aim to get slurry out. Make sure to minimise risk of nutrient losses by applying the correct rate, when ground conditions and soil temperatures are suitable, and by staying 10m from watercourses in the early weeks of the season.

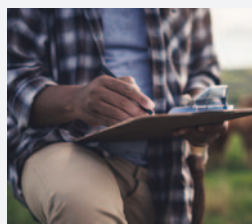
Applying slurry in early spring will not only grow more grass but help the

recovery of grass after grazing. Slurry can be used to replace the nitrogen (N) fertiliser application on a high proportion of the farm. An application of about 2,000-2,500 gallons of slurry/acre will supply about 20-25kg N/ha (16-20 units N/acre). Paddocks with the lowest cover of grass should be targeted for slurry application. If possible, the paddocks with lower soil phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) status should be targeted for slurry application. Ideally, the “best” slurry should be kept for silage ground. There will be a need for greater flexibility to get slurry spread. Target the most dilute slurry in the farmyard to be spread – most of the N is contained in the liquid fraction of slurry.

Start 2025 with health and safety in mind

As we start 2025, put safety and health front and centre in your plans and actions. Particular attention needs to be given to moving vehicles, such as tractors, teleporters and ATVs. Risks associated with livestock, slurry handling and avoiding falls from heights must also be closely managed. Take time now to review your risk assessment document and plan any necessary actions.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Review your risk assessment document now.

Get the transition period right

There are a number of key pillars to get right during the dry cow period to ensure the successful transition of the herd into early lactation.

Body condition score

Monitor body condition score (BCS) fortnightly during this period to ensure cows are at BCS 3.25 (range 3.0-3.5) for calving. Ensure silage quality is sufficient for dry cows; 68 DMD silage will support moderate BCS gain provided cows have at least eight weeks dry and are at BCS 2.75-3.0 at drying off.

It is particularly important to monitor later-calving cows (March/April) that have a longer dry period. Where possible, group later-calving cows together, and depending on BCS now and silage quality, restrict access to silage if necessary until three to four weeks pre calving to avoid cows exceeding a BCS of 3.5. Overfat cows have a higher risk of milk fever and metabolic disorders arising.

Pre-calver minerals

Ensure a consistent supply of pre-calving minerals (120g/cow/day) on a daily basis for six to eight weeks pre calving to allow adequate phosphorous (P), magnesium (Mg), trace elements and vitamins to be supplied for this period of rapid foetal growth. Dust minerals twice daily, particularly where feed space is limited. As a rule of thumb, a 25kg bag of minerals should be used every two days for a 100-cow herd. Be particularly conscious of the

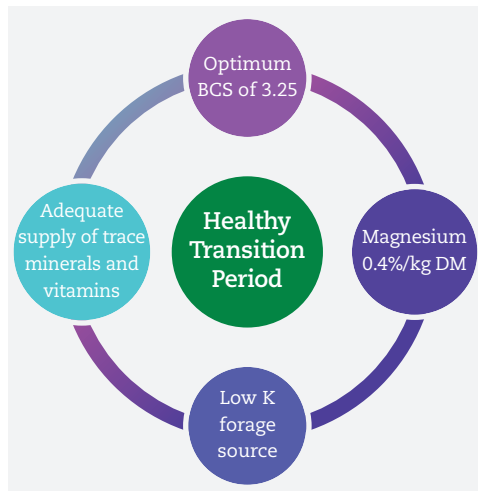


FIGURE 1: Key pillars for a succesful transition period.

calving shed/close-up group where stock numbers may be changing regularly to ensure cows are getting sufficient Mg (0.4%/kg DM) to support calcium mobilisation.

Low K forage source

High levels of potassium (K) in grass silage can be common due to the timing and volume of slurry application. K interferes with the absorption of Mg and can result in increased risk of sub-clinical milk fever. Avoid feeding silage with a K level in excess of 2.4% to cows in the final two to three weeks before calving to minimise these risks. If sub-clinical milk fever is an issue on your farm, consider an alternative silage source for close-up cows that got minimal K applications or consult with your advisor on alternative management strategies.

Keep good records

Indicators of sub-clinical milk fever (retained cleanings, mastitis, metabolic issues) can often be overlooked during such a busy time on farm, but they can result in impaired performance throughout early lactation, and in negative health and fertility outcomes. Good records will prove

helpful when seeking advice and support with issues.

Inadequate colostrum volume and/or poor quality may be an indicator of poor nutritional status of close-up cows. Test colostrum quality to ensure your newborn calves are receiving adequate transfer of immunity.

Correct cubicle liming/cleaning procedure

Keeping dry cow cubicle beds clean and dry is essential for mastitis prevention. Recent surveys found a massive variation in terms of lime use per cow/cubicle and also in the amount of times cubicles are limed per day. The recommendation is to use 1t of lime for every 20 cows (50kg per cow) for a five-month winter. That is 32kg per day (16kg morning/16kg evening) over 150 days of liming for milking/dry cows. Weigh how much goes into your bucket and check if what you are using is correct. Talking to over 100 farmers on what they have done to make this important but not-so-nice task of liming and cleaning cubicles easier, the following steps were recommended.

1. Brisket boards fitted in the cubicles are simple, cost effective and keep cubicles cleaner.
2. Have a dedicated area for storage of lime that is near to cubicles.
3. Store lime in an IBC tank with the top cut off. This is easier than filling buckets from a bulk bag.



Store lime near to cubicles for easy access.

4. Wear goggles and gloves. Lime can be dangerous to the eyes, hands and lungs.
5. Write down instructions on numbers of buckets to be used every day and have this placed up over where the lime is stored.
6. Invest in a mechanical liming/cleaning machine. You still have to lift and fill the hopper with lime but especially in larger herd sizes, it can save some time and make the task easier. The design and layout of sheds will dictate what machine you can purchase.