

DAIRY

May 2025

Top five tips for May

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Invest in soil fertility and grazing infrastructure.

1. Assess grazing stocking rate, excluding areas for silage and reseeding. How much grass are you offering? Mature herds need 19-20kg allocated; therefore, a stocking rate of 3.5 cows/ha requires a growth of 65-70kg to maintain cover. We see many farms stocked at >4.5 cows/ha to manage peak growth but this often leads to tight allocations and lack of options to manage grass. Be realistic in setting rotation demand. Speak to your advisor for more information.



EVERY
1%
REDUCTION
IN GRASS
DIGESTIBILITY
WILL REDUCE
MILK SOLIDS
YIELD BY
1.25%.

2. Make a plan to apply lime. This is too often put on the long finger and then forgotten, so make this year different. Apply on well-grazed paddocks based on test results. Spreading on silage fields after first cut is a good option; however, for areas due for another cut, wait until the last silage harvest of the year is complete.
3. Have you under-18s working on your farm? If so, you must display and follow the under-18s Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) guidelines.
4. Ensure cows calved more than 30 days and not seen in heat are checked and treated based on diagnosis, e.g., cystic, anoestrous, metritis. For most intervention schedules it takes at least a week to prep the cow to commence cycling, so do not delay the start of necessary treatments.
5. Budget forward for 2025 – it has been a very positive year to date on dairy farms, but the favourable financial situation can reverse quickly. Now is the time to plan and budget forward. Is extra infrastructure required? If extra debt is taken on, has repayment capacity been stress tested against lower milk returns? Could a reserve cash fund be built? What are the tax implications? Take time to carefully examine these issues.

Keep on top of grass quality

May is generally the month when the rate of grass growth reaches its peak for the year. Grass supply can change fast, so how you respond to grass growth is key.

Grass grows at a rate of 60-70kg DM/ha/day during May, so a 20-day rotation will result in 1,300-1,400kg/ha of grass growing in this three-week period. Every effort must be made to get cows to graze the right cover of grass. Keeping the sward green from top to bottom is important for both grass quality but also level of regrowth. The grass plant is right for grazing when it is at the three-leaf stage. If grass starts growing the 'fourth' leaf, the rotation is now getting too long! Also the first leaf starts to die and more stem starts to appear. This reduces the grass quality and the cows do not perform as well. Milk protein content in particular is very sensitive to grass quality. Every 1% reduction in grass



Grazing at the three-leaf stage ensures the best balance of pasture productivity and animal performance.

digestibility will reduce milk solids yield by 1.25%. Average farm cover should be at 160-180kg DM/cow. This is equivalent to an average farm cover of around 650kg DM/ha. Where paddocks are too strong in grass or where the rotation is too long, then the most suitable paddocks should be removed immediately as surplus grass for silage.

Clover – nitrogen management

In the summer when sward clover content is sufficient ($\geq 20\%$), nitrogen (N) fertiliser application can be reduced. Suggested N application strategies for grass-clover swards with a range of sward white clover content are outlined in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Chemical N usage based on April clover content.

| April clover content (%) | Mid Feb | Mid Mar | Mid April | Mid May (2 rot.) | Mid June (2 rot.) | Mid July (2 rot.) | Mid Aug | Mid Sept | Total |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------|----------|-------|
| Chemical fertiliser (kg N/ha) | | | | | | | | | |
| Grass sward | 24 | 36 | 20 | 32 | 28 | 28 | 21 | 23 | 212* |
| 5% | 20 | 35 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 175 |
| 10% | 20 | 35 | 20 | 15 | 15 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 150 |
| 15% | 20 | 35 | 20 | 15 | 10 | SW | 10 | 20 | 130 |
| 20% | 20 | 35 | 20 | 15 | SW | SW | SW | 15 | 105 |

*Chemical N fertiliser can be increased to 230kg N/ha in paddocks with no clover, as long as whole farm N does not exceed 212kg N/ha. Soiled water (SW) used whenever zero chemical N application – +25kg organic N applied.

Managing the use of stock bulls

Stock bulls will continue to be a vital part of breeding plans on many farms in 2025. Managing the transition from AI to stock bull usage is an important factor in breeding success.

Did you experience a lull in calving in 2025? Often, this coincides with the introduction of a bull. In many instances, the stock bull has spent months on a silage-only diet doing minimal daily walking, and is then turned out one day and expected to achieve 100% cover of cows in heat. This is unrealistic. Bulls should be monitored throughout the winter and spring for body and hoof condition. Check feet at least one month pre breeding, and do a fertility test. Trace minerals such as zinc, copper and selenium are important for performance and fertility – supplement for at least six weeks pre breeding.



Monitor bull hoof condition during the winter.

Continue to AI along with the introduction of the bull(s) for at least a week to give him a chance to settle in. The other common pitfall is the number of bulls. There doesn't appear to have been an increase in the number of bulls on most farms in recent years despite the increase in herd size. It is recommended to have:

- one young bull for every 10 empty females; and,

■ one mature bull for 20-30 empty females. If more than two cows are in heat per mature bull on one day, then these should be inseminated. Finally, for herds using synchronisation programmes in either heifers or

cows, it is best to AI the first round of repeats, as the numbers will be in excess of what bulls will be capable of physically dealing with in such a short space of time. Don't undo all your efforts by failing to do this.

Upcoming events

Moorepark Open Day 2025

Join us at the Moorepark Open Day 2025, on Wednesday, July 2, at Teagasc Moorepark, Fermoy, Co. Cork, P61 C996. This year's theme is 'Irish Dairying – Innovating for the Future'.

Walsh family dairy farm

Visit the award-winning Walsh family dairy farm, overall winners of the Teagasc/FBD Environmental Sustainability Award 2024. Ballylooby, Co. Tipperary – Eircode: E21 T938, Tuesday, June 10, 6.30pm

Crowe dairy farm

Visit the award-winning Crowe dairy farm, winners of the improving water quality category of the Teagasc/FBD Environmental Sustainability Award 2024. Carrigmore, Doon, Co. Limerick – Eircode: V94 HV56, Tuesday, June 24, 11.00am

See www.teagasc.ie/events for all event details.

Machinery safety

Most injuries on farms are caused by being struck by a farm vehicle. Blind spots exist around vehicles – particularly at close range. Be alert driving and go at a suitable speed. Give consideration to where vehicles and persons may be, particularly children. Implement segregation measures between vehicles and persons. Speak positively about dangers to children and young persons. Speak to your machinery contractors about safety. Make sure that PTO and power shafts are adequately covered.

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Machinery movement causes danger.