

General

- Feed Supply Plan-increase feed allowance in bad weather.
- Monitor body condition score regularly and adapt diet for optimum BCS.
- Introduce new feeds slowly.

Grass/Pasture

- Grassland Management Plan.
- Supplement diet (concentrates/silage) in poor weather.
- Provide magnesium supplements to recently calved cows at grass.

Silage and Concentrate Feeding

- Introduce concentrates gradually and with sufficient roughage.
- Analyse silage composition regularly.
- Allow all cows to access feed face at same time (0.75-1m/cow).

Water

- Continuous, access to fresh water for all cows.
- Troughs in all fields and parlour yard.
- Clean and test water quality and flow rates regularly.

Transition Period

- Increase feed allowance above maintenance pre-calving.
- Minimise weight loss in early lactation.
- Develop a nutritional strategy for prevention of milk fever.

Physical Comfort

- Non-slip flooring, ideally rubber.
- Sufficient space to lie comfortably.
- Mat plus dry bedding (15-30cm deep) in cubicles.
- Roadways maintained annually – top dressing replaced regularly.

Environmental comfort

- Good ventilation and lighting indoors.
- Shelter at pasture.
- House cows if weather too hot/wet.

Psychological comfort

- Appropriate stocking density for system to minimise social stress.
- At least one cubicle per cow (ideally 10% more cubicles than cows).
- Consider shoulder length barriers to minimise competitive feeding.

GOOD FEEDING

General

- Herd health and welfare management plan reviewed and updated annually.
- Calm and regular milking routine (twice daily) with gradual 'dry-off'.
- Dedicated hospital pens with deep, clean, dry bedding and clean water.

Biosecurity

- Good boundary fences.
- Minimise buying in stock.
- Foot bath at entrance to calving house and calf pens.

Lameness

- Biannual checks, trim hooves (if needed), regular footbath & monthly mobility scoring.
- Call hoof trimmer or vet to lame cows.
- Isolate lame cows on deep bedding. Restrict walking.
- Provide pain relief (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories) and hoof blocks for sole users.

Mastitis

- Record somatic cell counts.
- Milking machine maintenance and hygiene.
- Dry cow therapy and teat hygiene.
- Pain relief (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories) for cows with mastitis.

Calving

- Minimise stress pre and post calving.
- Calve cows in individual deep bedded pens (4m x 4m) with self-locking restraining gate.
- Avoid premature use of 'calving jack'/excessive force.
- Adopt calving schedule according to herd size and labour availability.

Culling & Euthanasia

- Humane 'cut-off' points to ensure prompt culling of injured, ill, or thin cows.
- Ensure fitness for transport (e.g. not in late pregnancy, able to stand/walk on all legs).

Good Practice for Dairy Cow Welfare

GOOD ENVIRONMENT

GOOD HEALTH

GOOD FARMERS AND STOCKPERSONS

Consumer Perceptions

A SWAB survey of 972 consumers on the island of Ireland showed that they have a generally positive perception of farm animal welfare on dairy farms but feel they lack knowledge.



General

- Understand animal behaviour.
- Recognise when veterinary intervention needed/when an animal should be euthanised.
- Always provide relief from pain (lameness, mastitis, injury).

Herding

- Minimise walking distances in bad weather and for lame cows.
- Allow cows to move calmly and quietly at their own pace.

Management

- Minimise social stress by minimising re-mixing and only mix unfamiliar animals in spacious area with safe underfoot conditions.
- Keep freshly calved heifers together and introduce to herd in small groups.
- Familiarise heifers with parlour prior to calving.
- Adopt low stress handling techniques - caring, calm, quiet and patient.
- Handle replacement stock regularly from a young age.
- Use drafting gates and well maintained handling facilities.

