

Top five tips for September

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It's best to solve winter feed issues early.

1. Budget grass from early September to reach a peak cover target of 1,100kg DM/ha by the end of the month (heavy-soil farms should aim for 100-200kg DM/ha less).
2. Test silage quality and complete a winter feed budget. Act early if a deficit exists – there is a good supply of winter feed in the country, but it's best to solve any issues early.
3. At least two autumn milk recordings are needed to help with decisions on dry cow treatments. Book a recording for early- to mid-September and another for three to four weeks before planned start of drying off.



**MORE
THAN**

5%

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level problem.**

4. Are your 2025 heifer calves on target? Weigh the group and select underweight individuals for additional concentrate feeding until housing.
5. Budget cash to establish your likely end-of-year position, and speak to

your accountant/financial advisor on implications for tax liabilities and options around them. Allow for €400 per cow cash/funding available to cover spring 2026 costs until mid-April.

Keep control of lameness this autumn

The good weather over the summer has contributed to better environmental conditions for lameness control. However, lameness risks increase significantly as we move into autumn. These include longer distances to walk where silage ground is back in rotation, wetter conditions in gaps and roads, leaves and debris creating dirtier surfaces, and cows entering the last trimester of pregnancy.

The average lameness rate in dairy herds is 6-8%, but having more than 5% of cows lame at any one time should be considered a herd-level problem. The majority of lameness cases in Irish dairy herds are mechanical in nature, e.g., white line disease caused by injuries from small stones, etc., as opposed to infectious issues such as dermatitis/Mortellaro. This will vary by herd, so it is worth reviewing the type of lameness occurring to identify solutions.

Some steps to reduce lameness are:

1. Remove build-up of soil along verges of roadways to allow surface water into fields – just doing this at numerous points along the road helps.
2. Cut back overgrowth along roadways that is creating surface pooling/problem areas.



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Outer claw

White line lesion

3. Resurface high-risk sections of road, having repaired the base and drainage in advance. Fit non-slip rubber flooring to high-traffic areas/tight turns in the yard.
4. Allow extra time for cows to walk on outlying/less frequently used parts of the road network. Use a timed/auto paddock opener if the farm set-up allows, and keep higher-risk animals back from the longer walks.
5. If buffer feeding is being done at milking and feed space is tight, hold a maximum of seven to eight cows per feed bay for feeding and allow the rest of the herd directly back to grass – this helps eliminate bullying and reduces lameness as a result.
6. Repeat lameness problems are very common in autumn. Bring in the hoof

trimmer before late September to check any cows with a history of lameness.

- Regular foot-bathing will not solve mechanical lameness issues but can improve hoof conditions and control

infections. Speak to your vet or advisor about a suitable autumn routine for your farm.

See also: <https://teagasc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Reducing-Lameness-Guide.pdf>.

Weigh your 2025 heifer calves

Having heifers at the right weight for breeding and calving results in much improved fertility and milk solids performance in first and second lactation. In many herds, heifers can tend to fall off target weight in autumn of the first grazing season and through the first winter dew; poor daily gains caused by poor grass intake/silage quality are common. Check your calf weights this month to track progress; the targets set out differ by maintenance sub-index, which is available on your Economic Breeding Index

(EBI) report (Table 1). Ask your advisor if you are unsure, or use the national average figure as a starting point if your herd is Holstein/Friesian type.

Ensure that the heifer calves receive a fresh break of quality grass at least every three days in the autumn. For heifers that are underweight for age/index, separate for extra concentrate feeding until housing. Test silage and reserve the equivalent of three bales of high-quality silage (>74 DMD) per heifer. These are priority stock for the winter.

Table 1: Target weights (kg) for February-born dairy heifers.

Maintenance index	Early Sept.	Late Dec./early Jan.	Next Apr.
€0	195	275	385
€10	180	268	355
National avg. (€13)	175	255	345
€20	165	242	325
€30	150	230	300

Grant aid for PTO shaft covers

The National Farm Safety Measure 2025 was introduced by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to incentivise the purchase and use of PTO shaft covers, which protect farmers and machinery operators from serious and fatal injuries.

Participants must submit an Expression of Interest to the Department before purchasing the PTO shaft cover. The grant aid is at a rate of 60%, subject to a maximum eligible cost of €100 per cover. Closing date November 7, 2025. Contact your advisor for more information.



Grant aid is at a rate of 60%.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Managing finances – focus on return on investment and long-term stability

2025 will finish as quite a positive one for dairy farm profitability. That said, the need to plan for future periods of poor profit and cashflow remains. Decisions on investment need to be taken with a longer-term view. Will the decision yield cash growth over time? Will it save or add cost? The following are some options, in order of priority:

1. **Soil fertility:** investment in soil fertility remains one of the best uses of surplus cash on a dairy farm. Every Euro spent on maintaining soil fertility delivers a return of between 4:1 and 7:1.
2. **Grazing infrastructure:** there is a very positive return on investing in new and improved farm roadways and suitable farm water systems. Plan carefully and with future herd size in mind.
3. **Clearing short-term debt:** before committing to new investments, farmers should consider clearing short-term debts, particularly high-cost debt. Paying down short-term liabilities improves the farm's financial position and provides greater flexibility in managing cashflow.
4. **Rainy day fund:** a recommended guideline is to set aside €600 per cow in a rainy day fund – in addition to the €400 per cow needed to support spring cashflow. Be mindful of likely tax liabilities as you plan for next year.
5. **Paying longer-term debt:** reducing bank debt over and above the existing scheduled repayments should only be considered where sufficient cash reserves are in place to withstand any future cashflow pressures. Lowering principal loan amounts decreases interest costs and strengthens the farm's balance sheet.
6. **Farmyard infrastructure:** projects such as additional slurry storage, expanded cubicle housing, or upgraded milking facilities are substantial investments that require careful planning. Financing through structured long-term borrowing is recommended to prevent cashflow issues.
7. **Labour-saving technology:** investing in equipment that reduces workload can have a significant impact on labour demands. Popular options are automatic calf feeders, auto heat detection systems, automatic drafting, and cubicle cleaning systems. Avoid committing too much cash to numerous items in this category!



Make investment decisions with a long-term view.