

Winter feed survey results

Edited by

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A survey of winter feed stocks was completed by 570 Teagasc client dairy farms across the country in early September (**Table 1**). This followed on from an earlier survey that had shown a healthy surplus of feed on farms. As expected however, the situation has since tightened due to the summer drought. For the Midlands/East and South East areas (corresponding to Tipperary/Waterford/Cork east and Leinster excluding Longford/Westmeath), around 15-20% of farms have reported significant silage shortages. A further 20-25% have concerns about tight feed supplies. In areas where summer feeding rates were lower and reserve stocks were in place, the situation is more secure but requires close monitoring as winter commences. The following actions are recommended by Teagasc:

- complete a winter feed budget (supply v demand) for your own farm this week; do

not rely on average figures to work out your best options – a simple budget can be completed on PastureBase Ireland (PBI), or speak to you Teagasc advisor for help;

- be realistic (and cautious) about assumptions regarding the length of winter – allow for extra days of feed supply in case of a late spring in 2023;
- do not ignore seemingly small deficits – remember, a 10% deficit today could become a 100% deficit by next March;
- take action to fill the feed gap before Christmas using options like purchased silage, straw and meal, hay, or restricted silage and meal; and,
- there is a reluctance to offload surplus/cull stock earlier in order to alleviate feed supply problems; however, early action can have a significant effect on feed supply next spring. Target empty cows and high somatic cell count (SCC) animals, etc., for earlier sale.

Table 1: Winter feed survey September 2022 – dairy results.

	South West	Border Midlands Western (BMW)/West	Midlands/East	South East
<i>Winter feed in stock (%)</i>				
Surplus silage >120%	23	47	17	21
OK for normal winter 100-120%	35	41	40	38
Tight supply 80-100%	30	10	24	26
Very short <80%	12	2	19	15
<i>Winter feed used summer (%)</i>				
<10%	65	88	46	60
10-20%	28	11	42	30
>20%	7	1	12	10
<i>Will you sell stock early?</i>				
No need	31	70	29	37
No – will buy extra feed	39	18	44	42
Yes as feed too expensive	26	12	20	19
Yes – have to sell	4	0	7	2


Drying off – preparation key to success

According to Teagasc’s milk quality expert, Don Crowley, preparation is the key to successful drying off. Clip tails in the days beforehand to ensure that things are as clean as possible on the day of drying off. Plan for the time and labour that it takes – more than one person is usually needed to allow you to do the job well. Have everything in the parlour before you start:

- cow markers;
- disposable gloves;
- 70% alcohol (i.e., surgical spirits) and cotton balls or disinfecting teat wipes;
- tubes of dry cow antibiotic and/or internal teat sealant;
- good source of light, such as a head torch; and,
- paper towels.

Don’t dry off cows during milking – draft them off and bring them back into a clean parlour (after you’ve had a good breakfast). Don’t be afraid to postpone if the weather is wet on the day that you planned to dry off – it’s hard to be hygienic when tails and udders are wet.

Teagasc, in partnership with Animal Health Ireland (AHI), and in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the dairy processors, will run 13 on-farm events from October 3-19 throughout the country. The purpose of these events is to showcase best practice around drying off and assist farmers with selective drying off strategies in light of changes to the legislation in the use of antibiotics. Details of the events can be found on the Teagasc and AHI websites.



Start taking soil samples for your farm. Don't delay until Christmas

Apply lime to low pH soils

Check your soil maps from NMP & apply K to low index soils

Do a self assessment of your farm's environmental sustainability

Check out your Bord Bia feedback report for your carbon footprint figure

Allow topped hedges to grow at least 1.5m above bank to allow thorn sapping in each hedge to grow to a thorn tree

HEALTH & SAFETY

Winter and well-being

Get ready for the winter. With animals returning indoors the yard will become very busy. It is important to check that your safety electrical switches or residual current devices (RCD) are working correctly. Check that farmyard lighting is adequate, as poor lighting is associated with farm accidents. If replacing bulbs or cleaning lenses always use appropriate equipment to gain access to the height. If you're in doubt or need advice always contact a qualified electrician.

Five Ways to Well-Being

Life can be hectic at times, but taking time to incorporate one or more of the Five Ways to Well-Being published by Mental Health Ireland into your life can help you function well and feel good.

1. Make the time each day to connect with other

people around you.

2. Be active – discover a physical activity that you enjoy.
3. Be aware and take notice of the world around you, e.g., the changing seasons.
4. Keep learning – try something new, set yourself a new challenge.
5. Give – giving to others is good for you.



If in doubt about anything electrical, contact an electrician.



Finding staff for spring 2023 – start early

With spring calving only four months away, now is the time to start looking for help for next spring. With this in mind the question is often asked how do I find help? Before we look at advertising options we must identify what position is available, what people want from farm employment, and can the farm offer some or all of people's requirements?

Research tells us people consistently want the following things from employment:

- flexible working hours;
- fair pay;
- training;
- good communication;
- responsibility;
- respect; and,
- good working conditions.

Change is happening on dairy farms, with more and more farmers now offering most or all of the above. After careful consideration to what the farm and farmer can offer, thought must be put into platforms for finding people. The common ways people find farm help are:

- the farmer identifies local help;
- word of mouth;
- local ads;

- social media; and,
- Jobs.ie/Gumtree.

It is becoming more and more common that farmers are proactively identifying people and asking them if they are interested in working on their farm. Speaking with local farmers and neighbours is another avenue that is also working well. Advertising posts in local papers, colleges, schools, social media, Jobs.ie, and Gumtree can also help farmers to find staff.

If you decide on a written a job advert, time and thought must be put into this. Ask yourself: "Would I apply for the job after reading the job advert?" Double check that you have included the items from the following checklist in your ad:

- farm location;
- farm description;
- role/responsibility;
- hours of work;
- rate of pay;
- experience/training; and,
- contact details.

While making the advert attractive is important for appealing to future employees, it must reflect what the farm/farmer can actually offer. Over promising and under delivering will lead to poor staff retention.

October in numbers

60%	Grazing area grazed by end of month (70% on heavy soils)
100-110%	Winter feed in stock or available for purchase
<120	Bulk tank SCC
5.30pm	Evening milking finished