



# Improving your wintering system

**A practical guide to find out what works best for you**





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# Wintering: An essential part of any dairy farming system

A successful farm system depends on having the right wintering system in place. It minimises animal, environmental, and compliance risks while supporting your investment decisions. Use this guide to evaluate your current system, pinpoint necessary improvements or changes, and create a plan.

## The benefits of wintering well:

- Supports good animal health and welfare
- Better response to periods of wet weather
- Reduces soil and nutrient loss
- Complements the overall farm system by better aligning winter management with autumn and spring management
- Farm teams can communicate and execute tasks easily and confidently
- Achieves feed and Body Condition Score (BCS) targets while remaining cost-effective
- Ensures environmental and animal welfare regulations are met



## Wintering system options

There are several wintering system options available, each with its own considerations. Depending on your farm business, you may consider a single option or a combination of options. Wintering innovation continues to evolve. Stay up to date at [dairynz.co.nz/wintering](http://dairynz.co.nz/wintering)



### Graziers

*"Have had the same grazier for over 5 years, great guy, does a good job. I check in with him regularly throughout the year and am there weekly over the winter"*

#### Consider:

- Reliability of the grazing and performance
- New and existing relationships to nourish
- Ability to monitor performance and outcomes
- Distance from milking platform
- Price and market drivers
- Set clear expectations with a grazing contract



### Support land

*"Provides control, closer to the milking platform the better."*

#### Consider:

- Location and size needed
- Time and commitment required
- If purchasing - level of capital investment required.
- If leasing - reliability of land for future use
- Consent requirements
- Ability to control the system



### In paddock

*"Planning/paddock plan/adverse weather plan means my whole team understands what they need to do."*

#### Consider:

- Infrastructure already in place (miking shed, effluent system, off paddock etc).
- Soil type, slope, paddock and cropping history
- Access to a reliable supply of supplements and crops
- Options for managing nutrient levels
- Consent requirements
- Impact on business profitability and staff requirements
- Amount of control over the system



### Off paddock

*"Built my barn for 2/3 of the herd (graze the rest of over winter), didn't want to over capitalise if I have to drop cow numbers going forward."*

#### Consider:

- Capital investment required (structure, effluent, machinery)
- Size and space needed to achieve cow feeding and lying times
- Access to feed and bedding material (if required)
- Effluent management system
- Options for managing nutrients
- Consent requirements
- Placement and design
- the skills required if this is a new system

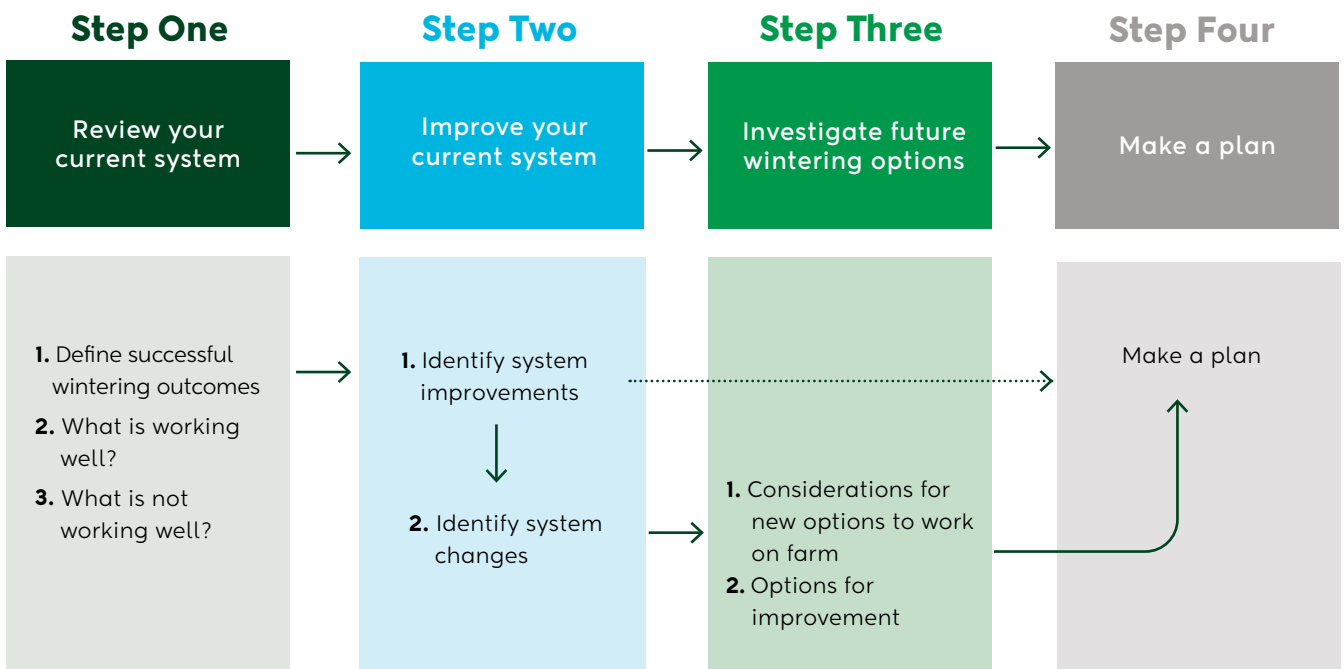
## Wintering system factors

There are several factors to consider when looking to improve or change your wintering system.

- Does it fit within the overall farm system, including autumn and spring management, staffing levels, cow numbers, profitability, and production targets?
- What wintering system are you comfortable with?
- Do you have reliable access to wintering feed through support land, graziers, home grown, or purchased in feed?
- Does the system require investment, and what is the length length of term of any investment?
- Who makes decisions about wintering systems on farm?
- Do you and your team have the skills to manage the system?
- Are there any farm specific risks to consider, like soil type, location, contour, weeds and pests, rules and regulations, biosecurity and consent conditions.

## Process for improving or changing your wintering system

Use the diagram below as a guide for improving or changing your wintering system.



# Step 1: Review your current wintering system

- ① Define your successful wintering outcomes.
- ② What is working well?
- ③ What can be improved?

## What are successful wintering outcomes for me?

*e.g cows can lie comfortably, my system meets my local council rules, cows are off farm for 11 weeks.*

Use this QR code for more information about good wintering practices



Complete the following sections to identify areas that are working well (rated **Yes**) and areas for improvement (rated **No**).

## Animal Welfare

	Yes	Sometimes	No	N/A
Cows have access to drinking water				
Cows are monitored daily for signs of ill health				
Cows are provided with shelter				
Cows have access to ad lib feed				
Cows are drafted into mobs utilising pregnancy scanning data				
Cows are drafted into mobs ultising BCS data				
Cows are transitioned onto winter feed correctly				
Feed allocation is increased during periods of adverse weather				
Cows do not calve on crop				
Cows can achieve at least 8 hours of lying time per day				
Cows can be easily removed off crop during bad weather				
Cow data from wearables is monitored (if available)				

## Sustainable system

The system can support livestock numbers comfortably	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
The system has a reliable supply of feed	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
The system could cope with potential environmental limits e.g. GHG emissions, water quality limits etc	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
The system requires capital investment to remain fit for purpose	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
The system can manage nutrients effectively	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue

## Environmental

Low risk paddocks are considered for winter crop. Risk factors include: slope, proximity to waterways, CSA's present, soil type and erosion prone	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Paddocks are low risk and managed for erosion, run off to water and groundwater leaching	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
If paddocks are more free draining, nitrogen budgets explore ways to minimise nitrogen loading and loss	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Maximum slope of paddocks are 10 degrees or less	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Critical source areas are not cultivated	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Portable water troughs are located near the feed face	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Back fences are moved every 2-3 days, allow enough space for cows to move freely and lie down, and can be repositioned in adverse weather if required	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Paddocks are grazed strategically to minimise soil and nutrient loss	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Paddocks are grazed strategically to reduce pugging and compaction of soils	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Paddocks have at least 2 access points	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Off paddock structures (feed or stand off pads) are used during wet weather	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Livestock are kept at least 5m away from waterways*	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue
Supplementary feed is kept out of gullies or swales	Green	Light Green	Blue	Light Blue

\*check your regional council rules

## Council regulations

*Is your system compliant with regional council wintering regulations?  
Contact your regional council for rules and regulations for your area.*

- Southland Regional Council
- Otago Regional Council
- Environment Canterbury
- West Coast Regional Council
- Tasman District Council
- Auckland Council
- Northland Regional Council
- Marlborough District Council
- Greater Wellington Regional Council
- Horizons Regional Council
- Taranaki Regional Council
- Bay of Plenty Regional Council
- Waikato Regional Council

Regional Regulation	Am I compliant?	If no, how can I improve or change my system to be compliant?



## Step 2: Identify system improvements and changes

Use the areas you have identified as 'no' or 'sometimes' in Step One to complete Step Two.

- ① Identify system improvements required.
- ② Identify system changes required.

Section	Action	Improvement in current system	Is a system change required for improvement?
<i>e.g Animal welfare</i>	<i>Cows are kept out of critical source areas (CSA's)</i>	<i>CSA's will be fenced off before cows enter the paddock</i>	No

If you have identified actions that require a system change, use these to move onto Step Three, otherwise move onto Step Four.

# Step 3: Investigate options when you need or want to change your wintering system

- ① **What do I need to consider for it to work for me?**
- ② **What are my options going forward?**

Using the actions you identified in Step Two as needing a system change for improvement, consider how the changes would work for you and your business, then identify what your options would be.

## Will the proposed changes:

*Be easy to implement? Require upskilling of staff? Require investment? Fit into the current farm system? Align with farm goals and vision? Be a sustainable option?*

## What are some future options to achieve this?

*E.g: wintering in paddock - low intensity, wintering in paddock - high intensity, off paddock infrastructure - feed pads, loose house barn etc, wintering at a grazier, wintering at a support block, change in feed or crop type.*

Use the QR code  
for information on  
wintering systems



# Step 4: Develop a plan

## Actions for current system improvement

Using the improvements you have identified, use the table below to plan how to implement these changes:

Improvement	Actions	Responsible
<i>E.g. CSA's will be fenced off before cows enter the paddock</i>	<i>When setting the paddock up for winter grazing, fence off the CSA's with waratahs at this time</i>	<i>John</i>

## Actions for a system change

Using the future options you have identified, what are your next steps?

Future option	Actions/Next steps	Responsible
<i>e.g. A larger support block</i>	<i>Find out what my current support block is worth, is there any neighbouring land for sale? How will this extra land impact my wintering consents?</i>	<i>John</i>









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