Setting pasture and animals up for spring

- Budget your feed to when feed supply matches demand, especially if often short of feed in the spring.
- Monitor, monitor pasture cover and BCS (body condition score) at least every three weeks and take action if not on target – secure additional supplemental or graze off dry cows, as required.
- Set up how spring feed will be allocated e.g. Spring Rotation Planner.
- Set up systems to feed cows and avoid puddling damage in wet weather.
- Spend time checking feed allocation of pasture, crops and supplement.
- Poor feed allocation is the number one cause of cows not achieving target BCS at calving.
- If grazing off, clarify expectations with your grazer regarding feed, cow condition and welfare.
- Treat new pasture (and chippy crops) with great care. Management in the first year largely determines pasture persistence.
- Realistically, well-fed cows can only gain half a BCS when dry, unless luxury feed pasture and a supplement that is very efficient for liveweight gain e.g. PK5.
- Look after heifers. They must be BCS 5.5 at calving.
- When heifers arrive back from grazing, check mineral levels and worm burden.
- Transition cows onto crops and offer enough fibrous supplements and minerals. Refer to DairyNZ Farmfacts Fodder Beet – feeding to dairy cows (1-73) and Winter crops – feeding to dairy cows (1-75).
- If getting more than 85% utilisation of a crop, cows may be eating the lower value parts of the crop, and cows will not be gaining weight.

Tip: Check out the Spring Rotation Planner at dairynz.co.nz/vrp.

Take care of pregnant cows

- Minimise risk of abortion by ensuring cows and replacement heifers don’t have access to macrocarpa (cypress) or pine needles, and mouldy silage.
- Be wary of nitrate poisoning risk in new or rapid growing pastures, which can also cause abortions.
- Keep an eye out for signs of abortion and know what to do when a cow aborts (see pg 140 of the DairyNZ InCalf Book).
- Be ready to record calving problems, as described in the checklist on pg 133 of the DairyNZ InCalf Book. These records will be vital for reducing calving problems in future.
- Set up protocols for drafting springers into mobs, according to calving dates (for ease of supplement management and inspection).

Tip: Visit dairynz.co.nz/incaff for contact details of your local InCalf advisor.

Getting ready for calving

- Get herd records up-to-date and order tags for heifers.
- Mark early calving cows with a permanent marker (e.g. tail tape) so they are easy to identify.
- Vaccinate for rotavirus and leptospirosis.
- Train heifers through the milking platform in readiness for calving. Try and run heifers through the shed at least three times before calving. It makes a big difference in the spring, especially in a rotary shed.
- Check and maintain races to minimise lameness problems.
- Check there is access to a safe and operational restraint facility at runoffs, to ensure urgent veterinary inspections can be carried out if needed.
- Make sure stock are checked daily over winter (including at runoffs) to identify animal health issues early (e.g. doo cows, slip abortions).
- Make sure yearling (1yr) heifers are sufficiently fed through winter, and have a dentring and mineral supplement plan.
- Check and prepare calf housing facilities. Make sure there is a designated area available for separating sick calves, to minimise diseases from spreading.
- Decide on a calf feeding programme then order the feed and equipment needed.
- If sending cows off-farm for winter grazing, ensure animals being transported are fit and healthy, and have been stood off green feed for 4-12 hours prior to loading. Provide hay and water during the stand-off time.
- Stock up on metabolics and restock the antibiotic cupboard ready for calving.

Tip: For more information, visit dairynz.co.nz/calving for more information.

Carry out seasonal effluent management

- Carry out maintenance and servicing on effluent equipment for the coming season.
- Work through your regional Compliance Checklist to identify areas which need attention.
- Train staff on effluent management before calving. Cover: rules, roles, responsibilities, monitoring, recording and contingency plans.
- Avoid runoff from forage crops and hillside grazing reaching waterways – create a 3m grass buffer strip with a hot wire.
- Stand-off padd lev must be captured and managed through the effluent system.

Tip: For more information, visit dairynz.co.nz/effluent.

Minimise the impact of mastitis

Prevent
- Treating heifers with internal teat sealant four weeks before calving may be an option to prevent mastitis at calving. Discuss with your vet.
- Treat spraying 2-3 times per week before calving, or removing calves from cows within the first 10-12 hours after calving, can also help reduce mastitis.
- Ensure all cows are milked out completely, before leaving the colostrum mob.
- Treat spray after every milking. Add extra emulsiﬁer until the weather improves and risk of teat skin damage reduces.

Tip: For more on making up teat sprays, see DairyNZ Healthy Udder Prevent P and SmartSMiTH Guideline 7. Available at dairynz.co.nz/smartsamm.

Find and treat
- Keep an eye out for cows with dry cow mastitis. Check dry cows daily in the paddock, and if possible, palpate udders every 2-3 weeks.
- Set up systems to ensure all newly calved cows are stripped and checked for clinical signs at each milking in the colostrum mob. Use the Rapid Mastitis Test before they leave the colostrum herd to identify high SCC (somatic cell count) cows, which can be retained in the colostrum herd for another 24-48 hours.
- Record details and treat only clinical cases.
- Continue stripping all cows weekly for clinical signs during the first 6-8 weeks of the season. Do the task over two or more milkings to spread the load.

Tip: To get new employees off on the right foot, make sure you have a look at the DairyNZ QuickStart Recruitment Kits at dairynz.co.nz (publications > people).

Plan with your people

- Review the autumn period with the team – what went well? What could be done better? Make sure the lessons are learnt and documented for next season.
- Review objectives and plans for winter/spring management with your team. Make sure everyone is prepared and understands the routine and their responsibilities over calving.
- Set up systems to ensure all newly calved cows are stripped and checked for clinical signs at each milking in the colostrum mob. Use the Rapid Mastitis Test before they leave the colostrum herd to identify high SCC (somatic cell count) cows, which can be retained in the colostrum herd for another 24-48 hours.
- Record details and treat only clinical cases.
- Complete final paper work and exit interviews if you have employees moving on. What can you learn to make yourself a better employer?
- New employees? Get the following in place before new people begin working on-farm:
  - employment agreement – signed by both parties before they start work
  - job description
  - orientation plan
  - dates in your diary to allow time to conduct an effective orientation programme
  - tenancy agreement (if providing accommodation)
  - annual roster
  - communication is often a challenge when new staff come onboard. Could setting regular team meetings help?

Keep a keen eye on your business

- Cost control is the biggest driver of profitability on dairy farms and spring is probably the time of the year when costs can slip most easily. Some tips to control costs:
  - make sure you have a plan and a budget to manage this period.
  - stick to a plan (within reason) means that you will be making spur-of-the-moment decisions.
  - monitor actual to budget to ensure you don’t get any nasty surprises.
- This is estimated to reduce costs by 10%.

Tip: Rolling off farmers is a useful way to keep on top of management and challenge decision-making.

Set goals for next season

- Identify 2-3 key goals and discuss with staff.
- Set target production and other targets e.g. reduction in SCC, AB (artificial breeding) submission rates, cow losses.

Tip: DairyNZ Quickplan can help with goal setting. Visit dairynz.co.nz/quickplan.

For more information visit the DairyNZ website dairynz.co.nz

0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969)