Ireland's Dairy & Beef Nutrition Bulletin

Expert animal feed advice and updates from Specialist Nutrition to maximise performance on Irish farms

Specialist Nutrition
Moist Feed & Forage Specialists

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High price wins on beef but what next for finishers?

As 2025 sees beef prices continue to soar, the increasing cost of buying cattle has many beef finishers wondering what to do next.

Will the upward price trend hold to ensure good profitability in 2026? Will the rising price of beef on the shelves and on restaurant plates turn off some consumers? With reports this week of a €50 price tag becoming the restaurant norm for a steak, some farmers could be forgiven for questioning whether the current demand will continue.

Beef finishers, although taking advantage of the favourable prices today, are considering these questions as they look forward to the months ahead.

Buying cattle at higher prices means even greater attention should be given to ensuring high performance from efficient feeding and the avoidance of animal health issues when finishing.

Specialist Nutrition's Nigel Condell says "performance is key" to offset any drop in beef prices over the next 12 months and beyond.

He said: "Good performance means good health and farmers should ensure they are monitoring that closely and consistently.

"There's a need to focus on getting the balance right in diets and to ensure theree are quality feedstuffs in the ration — maize meal, barley, soya, or beef pulp, and good quality silage if in the shed.

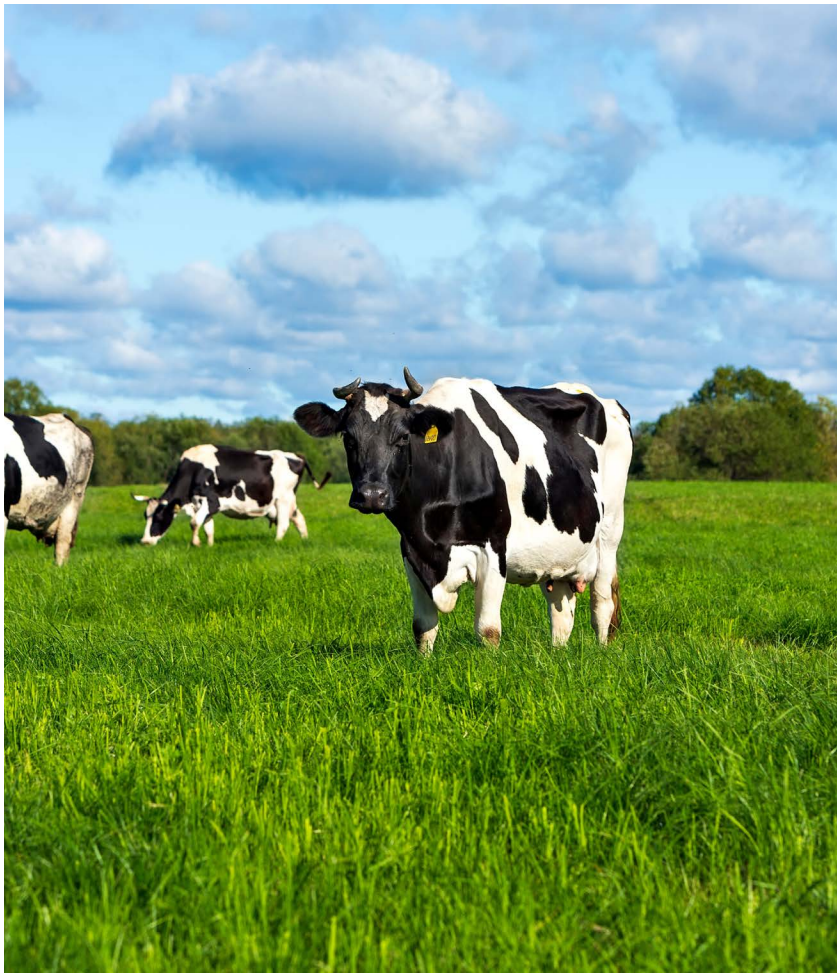
"It's important to focus equally on all the small but essential things, like making sure there's clean, fresh water at all times, making sure there's adequate feed space, and checking for good health consistently.

"Those able to do the small things right while getting the most from their feedstuffs in a well-balanced diet are always the farmers who get the most from their animals."

Specialist Nutrition can help you plan to ensure your animals perform to their full potential. To speak with one of our nutritionists about maximising nutrition for high performance and profitability or to request a farm visit, call us on + 353 (0) 51 833071.

How to Get Early Lactation Nutrition Right This Spring

With spring calving in full swing, getting early lactation nutrition right is crucial to setting dairy cows up for a productive and healthy season. As energy output increases rapidly while appetite lags behind, cows face a significant energy gap (negative energy balance) in the first six to eight weeks post-calving. If this gap isn't managed correctly, cows mobilise their fat reserves, putting severe pressure on the liver which can lead to issues such as infertility, metabolic disorders, and reduced milk yield. Ensuring cows receive the right nutrition during this phase is essential to maintaining their health, fertility, and long-term performance.



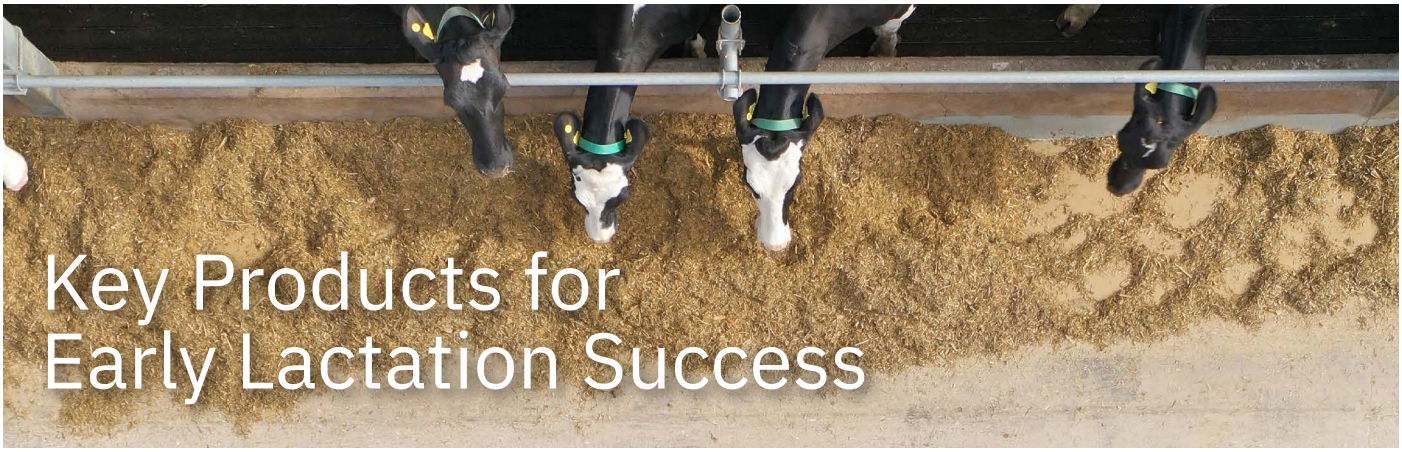
The Problem: Managing the Early Lactation Energy Gap

When a cow enters early lactation, her energy output increases rapidly, but her dry matter intake lags behind. This creates an unavoidable negative energy balance. To bridge this gap, cows instinctively turn to their fat reserves, breaking them down for energy. However, excessive fat mobilisation places extreme pressure on the liver, which can result in metabolic disorders such as ketosis and fatty liver syndrome. These conditions not only impact milk production but also weaken the cow's immune system, making her more susceptible to disease.

Fertility is another major concern. Cows struggling with an energy imbalance often experience delayed ovulation and poor reproductive performance, leading to longer calving intervals and reduced overall herd efficiency. Additionally, the disruption in metabolic function can contribute to other production-limiting conditions such as sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA), further compounding performance issues. Reduced rumen function and low dry matter intake post-calving can also increase the risk of displaced abomasum (left or right).

The Solution: A Targeted Nutritional Approach

To prevent cows from over-relying on their fat reserves and support a smoother transition into lactation, farmers must implement a carefully balanced diet that prioritises high-energy, digestible feeds, rumen buffers, and essential minerals. The goal is to provide enough readily available energy while stabilising rumen function and supporting liver health.



Key Products for Early Lactation Success

A combination of high-energy feeds, buffers, and minerals can help cows transition smoothly into lactation, ensuring optimal performance and health. Specialist Nutrition offers a tailored approach with key products designed to address early lactation challenges:

Carfe Excel: Protected fat is an essential solution for cows in early lactation. Unlike traditional fats that break down in the rumen and disrupt digestion, protected fat bypasses the rumen and is absorbed in the intestines. Carfe Excel provides a direct, high-energy source that supports milk production while preventing excessive fat mobilisation. By incorporating Carfe Excel into the diet, farmers can help cows maintain body condition and reproductive health during this high-demand period.

Sugar: A highly palatable, energy-dense ingredient that encourages dry matter intake. Sugar is particularly beneficial when appetite is low, as cows are more likely to consume it than traditional feed. It provides a rapid energy boost to help bridge the early lactation energy gap.

Enerbot Pro: For farms using robotic milking systems, Enerbot Pro provides an easy-to-administer, high-energy solution in liquid form. This product delivers both energy and protein in a fast-absorbing format, ensuring cows receive the nutrients they need to sustain milk production and recovery. With robotic systems, Enerbot Pro can be dispensed individually, allowing precise feeding based on each cow's specific energy requirements, helping to optimise performance and prevent metabolic issues.

Vistacell Yeast: A live yeast supplement that enhances rumen efficiency by improving fibre digestion and feed utilisation. It also helps prevent digestive upsets and reduces the risk of acidosis in high-producing cows.

Acid Buff: A natural rumen buffer that stabilises pH levels, reducing the risk of sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA). By maintaining a healthy rumen environment, Acid Buff helps optimise digestion and feed efficiency.

Dairy Minerals: A comprehensive mineral package tailored for high-yielding dairy cows. These essential minerals support milk production, fertility, and overall metabolic function, ensuring cows receive the nutrients they need to thrive.

Supporting Cows for a Strong Start

By providing cows with the right balance of energy, protein, and essential nutrients, farmers can maximise early lactation performance while safeguarding long-term health and fertility.

At Specialist Nutrition, we understand that early lactation nutrition is vital for keeping cows healthy, productive, and fertile. Our range of innovative feed solutions ensures your herd receives the energy they need without compromising rumen health or long-term performance.

For expert advice on optimising your herd's nutrition this spring-calving season, contact Specialist Nutrition today and let us help you bridge the energy gap effectively.

Farm Safety Focus: Staying Safe During Calving Season

Calving season is one of the busiest and most demanding times on Irish farms, but it's also one of the most dangerous. Cows with newborn calves can be highly unpredictable, and every year, serious injuries and fatalities occur due to attacks.

Understanding the Risk

Health and Safety Authority data shows that livestock-related incidents account for a significant number of farm fatalities — cows with calves being a leading cause. Even the quietest cow can become aggressive when protecting her newborn.

Key Safety Tips for Calving Season:

Have a safe handling system – Use a well-designed calving pen with a calving gate to protect yourself.

Never turn your back on a cow – Stay alert and keep an escape route open at all times.
Keep a physical barrier between you and the cow – If possible, separate the cow from the calf when tagging or handling.

Be cautious of first-time calvers – These cows can be particularly unpredictable.

Avoid working alone – If you must, let someone know where you are and check in regularly.

Mind your own wellbeing – Fatigue and stress can lead to poor decisions. Take breaks and get enough rest during busy calving periods.

Calving is a crucial time for farm productivity, but safety should always come first. Planning ahead and using the right facilities can prevent serious accidents and ensure a safer calving season for both farmers and livestock.

Meeting Nutritional Needs When Turning Cows Out to Grass

Fresh green grass is a welcome sight in spring, but early-season pasture with limited growth or volume requires careful management when used as the main source of nutrition for recently calved cows.

With insufficient grass volume, cows may not meet their energy and protein needs, leading to a loss in body condition. While fresh grass is an excellent source of nutrition, its dry matter content fluctuates significantly due to weather conditions, growth stage, and management practices. This variability can lead to cows consuming less energy than expected, impacting performance and body condition. To prevent production dips and metabolic stress, farmers must carefully manage the transition to grazing and ensure cows have access to energy-dense and palatable feeds.

Managing the Transition to Grazing

It's easy to assume that cows get everything they need from lush spring grass. However, the reality is that grass dry matter levels change rapidly, and excessive water content can dilute the available nutrients. If cows don't consume enough dry matter, their energy intake drops, leading to reduced milk yields, weight loss, and fertility challenges.

Another common mistake is overestimating how well cows adapt to dietary changes. A sudden shift from winter rations to a full-grazing system can disrupt rumen function,and negatively affect feed efficiency. Instead of allowing cows to adjust gradually, an abrupt change can cause digestive upset, lower intake, and impact overall performance.

A Structured Approach to Grazing Nutrition

To ensure cows continue to meet their energy needs, farmers should follow a step-by-step transition plan that includes:

Setting Up 2-3 Diets – Instead of moving cows straight onto full-time grazing, gradually introduce grass alongside existing feeds. A phased approach helps maintain rumen stability and prevents digestive upsets.

Monitoring Grass Dry Matter – Regularly assessing grass dry matter levels ensures accurate feeding adjustments. When dry matter content is low, additional supplementation is required to maintain performance.

Using Energy-Dense Feeds – Supplementing with highly palatable, high-energy feeds helps bridge nutritional gaps and stabilise production. Specialist Nutrition offers targeted solutions to complement grazing diets.

Key Products to Support Grass-Based Diets

Enerbot Pro – A liquid energy and protein feed designed for robotic milking systems, ensuring cows receive the right nutrients on an individual basis. This helps maintain energy intake even as diet composition shifts.

Sugar – A fast-acting, highly digestible energy source that stimulates appetite and supports rumen function. When included in the diet, sugar encourages cows to maintain dry matter intake, particularly in periods of dietary transition.

Grass Watch & Feeding Guidelines – Specialist Nutrition provides expert guidance on grass dry matter fluctuations and tailored feeding strategies to ensure cows receive a balanced diet throughout the grazing season.

Understanding Dry Matter in Grass: Why It's Essential for Grazing and Forage Management

Dry matter (DM) refers to the percentage of a plant's total content that remains after the removal of water. This includes the plant's fibres, proteins, ash, water-soluble carbohydrates, and lipids. By understanding the DM content in grass and forage, farmers can manage their livestock's nutritional intake more effectively.

The dry matter percentage is crucial because it directly influences the amount of fresh forage needed to meet a specific nutrient requirement. A lower DM content means that more fresh weight of grass or conserved forage will be necessary to achieve the target intake. This is especially relevant for both grazed grass and preserved forage.

Total ME supplied (MJ/cow/day)	Grass ME(MJ/kg/ DM)	Grass DM(%)	Fresh grass required (kg/cow/day)
160	10	16	100
160	10	18	89
160	10	20	80
160	10	22	73
192	12	16	100
192	12	18	89
192	12	20	80
192	12	22	73

The Variability of Dry Matter in Grass

The DM content of grass can vary significantly due to factors like field conditions and weather patterns. Additionally, the type of grass—diploid versus tetraploid—affects the DM content. Diploid grasses typically have a higher DM content (about 2% more than tetraploids) because of their smaller cell structure and lower cell wall-to-cell contents ratio.

This means that livestock grazing on a tetraploid sward may need to consume more fresh grass to meet the same nutritional needs as those grazing on a diploid sward.

In terms of yield, modern ryegrass varieties have been bred for maximum production, with top-rated perennial ryegrasses capable of yielding over 14 t DM/ha, while weed grasses, such as creeping bent or annual meadow grass, may produce as little as 2 t DM/ha. Ryegrass production follows a typical growth pattern, peaking at around 120 kg DM/ha per day in May and generally declining to about one-third of that peak by early autumn.

Maximising Dry Matter for Optimal Forage Quality

When grazing, the goal should be to manage the sward so that it offers a balance of fresh, nutritious growth with the right fibre content for efficient rumen passage. This is best achieved by implementing a grazing rotation of 18-21 days during the peak season. Poor sward management can lead to an increase in dead plant material, which significantly reduces both the quality and intake potential of the forage.

Key Dry Matter Tips:

- Use seasonal DM yield data when selecting the best varieties from the Irish Recommended List.
- Keep in mind that livestock on wet pasture will need to consume a greater amount of fresh forage to meet their nutritional requirements.
- Delaying silage cutting increases yield but can reduce forage quality.

Keep Energy Intake Consistent for Optimal Performance

By carefully managing the transition to grazing, monitoring grass dry matter, and providing the right nutritional support, farmers can ensure cows maintain peak performance without energy shortfalls. Specialist Nutrition's expert team is on hand to help develop customised feeding plans that support milk production, fertility, and overall cow health. **For more information on optimising grazing nutrition, contact Specialist Nutrition today.**

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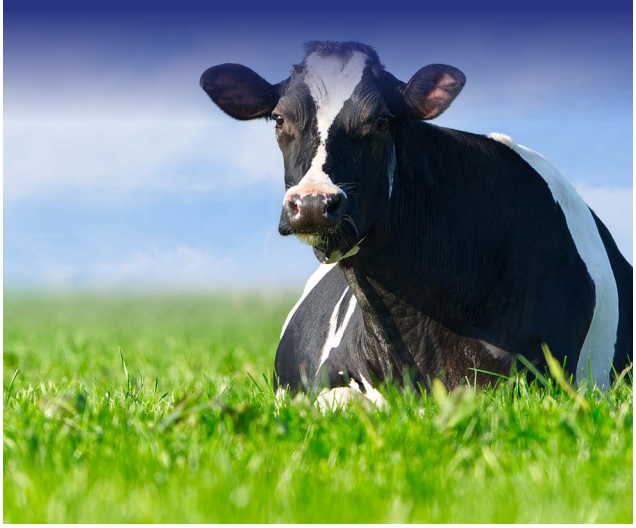
Enerbot Pro

Precision nutrition that drives cows to the robot

Target cows individually according to need via your robot with highly palatable liquid energy and protein for high performance.



Acid Buf Rumen Buffer

Acid Buf™ helps optimise digestion and feed efficiency to promote healthy, high performance herds.

- Acid Buf™ is a highly efficient rumen buffer made from calcareous marine algae.
- It has a unique marine mineral matrix that consumes excess acid in the rumen and regulates long term optimum pH in the rumen.
- Its natural honeycomb structure breaks down slowly in the rumen providing twice the buffering capacity of sodium bicarbonate, even when fed at much lower concentrations.
- Acid Buf is a slow-release rumen conditioner that reduces the time below pH 5.5 to less than 1 hour and maintains a higher daily (24hour) mean pH.

- Acid Buf is the leading rumen buffer and a 100% natural animal feed ingredient.
- Acid Buf's long-lasting buffering ensures a stabilised rumen pH for optimal fibre digestion.

Vistacell Yeast Rumen Enhancer

Vistacell™ ensures the delivery of the highest dose rate of live yeast for ruminants (60 billion CFU/head/day) on the market.

- Vistacell™ acts as a probiotic to improve rumen and gut health by boosting the growth of beneficial rumen bacteria and improving rumen fermentation.
- By removing oxygen and competing for sugars in the rumen, Vistacell improves the environment for fibre digesting and lactate utilising microbes, allowing them to thrive and grow. The result is an increase in microbial protein production, and optimised rumen pH, and improved fibre digestion.

- All factors are essential in maximising the efficiency of high performing dairy cows.
- The higher the live yeast dose rate, the greater the response - for high performance choose Vistacell™.

Silage Additive

Maximise the value of home-grown forage

- Ensuring high-quality silage is key to boosting farm profitability. Even a 1 MJ increase in silage ME can contribute up to 4L of extra milk per cow, making silage management a critical factor in overall performance.
- Magniva Silage Additives help preserve the nutritional value of your silage, improving fermentation, reducing spoilage, and retaining more nutrients for your herd.
- Whether you're ensiling grass, maize, wholecrop, or crimp, Magniva's crop-specific solutions ensure optimal preservation and aerobic stability at feed-out.
- With Magniva Platinum Additive, you gain the flexibility to open silage clamps after just 15 days, maintaining stability and maximising feeding efficiency.

Enhance your silage quality today—contact us to find the right Magniva additive for your farm.

Cut Your Silage Efforts In Half With Silostop

Cut Your Silage Efforts In Half With Silostop
Maintain top quality throughout storage periods, with just 50% of the pitting work

Protecting your silage from oxygen, wildlife, sunlight and more has never been easier thanks to Silostop protective films and covers.
Using Silostop will ensure you have the best quality silage, with 50% less time and labour than it takes to cover your pit with plastic and tyres.
These easy-to-use silage pit solutions are super robust and will last year after year to increase your farm's efficiency and free you up to complete other essential tasks.
Silostop users enjoy a high return on investment, reduced environmental impact and improved silage quality. For the best solution to protect your silage from oxygen, birds/wildlife, UV light, and more choose from our innovative Silostop range.

SILOSTOP Orange Film >

SILOSTOP Anti-UV Cover >

SILOSTOP Values

Innovation
Keeping at the forefront of research and development is key. We utilise unique, research-backed, industry-leading products in combination with exceptional technical support to deliver a reduction in your waste and an increase on your return on investment.

Support
Providing you with peace of mind is our top priority. Our team of technical experts are dedicated to keeping up to date with the latest developments in the field to give you the best support possible throughout your ensiling process, ensuring you get the most out of your silage storage.

Responsibility
We live and breathe people and the planet. Taking care of our team, customers, suppliers, and environment is the beating heart of our business. Engaging in more sustainable practices and processes allows us to build long-lasting relationships, reduce our impact on the planet, and actively mitigate your carbon footprint.

For more information on Specialist Nutrition's Silostop range, please call **+ 353 (0) 51 833071.**