



A successful Dry Cow Period is dependant on five key criteria; correct body condition score (BCS), length of the dry period, nutrition, grouping of cows, and adequate feeding space and cubicles to minimize bullying.

The targets for the dry cow period are to have a live healthy calf and colostrum produced that has high immunoglobulin content. It is also important that the cow is healthy, calves down easily and goes back in calf giving the farmer more options around breeding and culling.

The cow should have minimum metabolic issues such as milk fever and ketosis, allowing her to proceed to a good lactation, reaching peak yield with optimum milk composition.

Body condition scoring is a reliable way of assessing the fat cover of your animals. The target dry cow period is eight weeks for mature cows and for animals in optimal BCS. However, when one has first lactation animals and/or older cows in sub optimal condition or cows carrying twin calves, one should aim for a 10 – 14 week dry period.

The ideal situation is that an animal is dried off in the correct BCS and this is maintained until she calves down. However when animals are dried off in sub optimal BCS they should be fed to increase their BCS in the dry period.

It is vital to test silage quality and balance the dry cow diet depending on these results. The target is to maximise dry matter intake (DMI) throughout the dry period. This in turn promotes higher DMI in early lactation, however the energy density of the diet must be controlled to stay within the BCS guidelines.

Target BCS	
BCS at Drying off	2.75-3.0
BCS at Calving	3.0-3.25
BCS at 42 days in milk	2.75 minimum
BCS at Breeding	2.75 minimum
BCS in Late Lactation	2.75-3.0

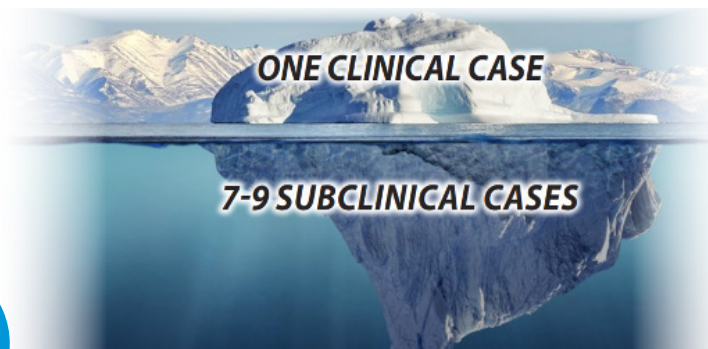
BCS Targets

Dry Cow Minerals

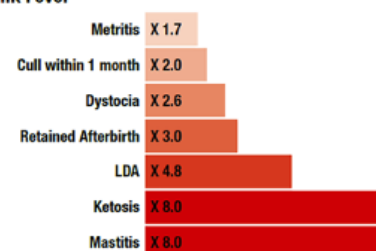
One of the single biggest challenges on a dairy farm is to have a calving season free from metabolic issues such as Milk Fever, Ketosis, Displaced Abomasum, retained placenta and Fatty liver syndrome. Such metabolic issues come as a large cost on farm when present in both clinical and sub-clinical forms. Prevention of these issues occurring next spring starts during the dry cow period.

Inadequate mineral supplementation during the dry period can cause problems with new-born calf health, as well as a greater risk of problems with cow health. Dry cows should get pre-calving minerals at least six to eight weeks pre calving. Replacement heifers should be fed minerals 12 weeks pre calving.

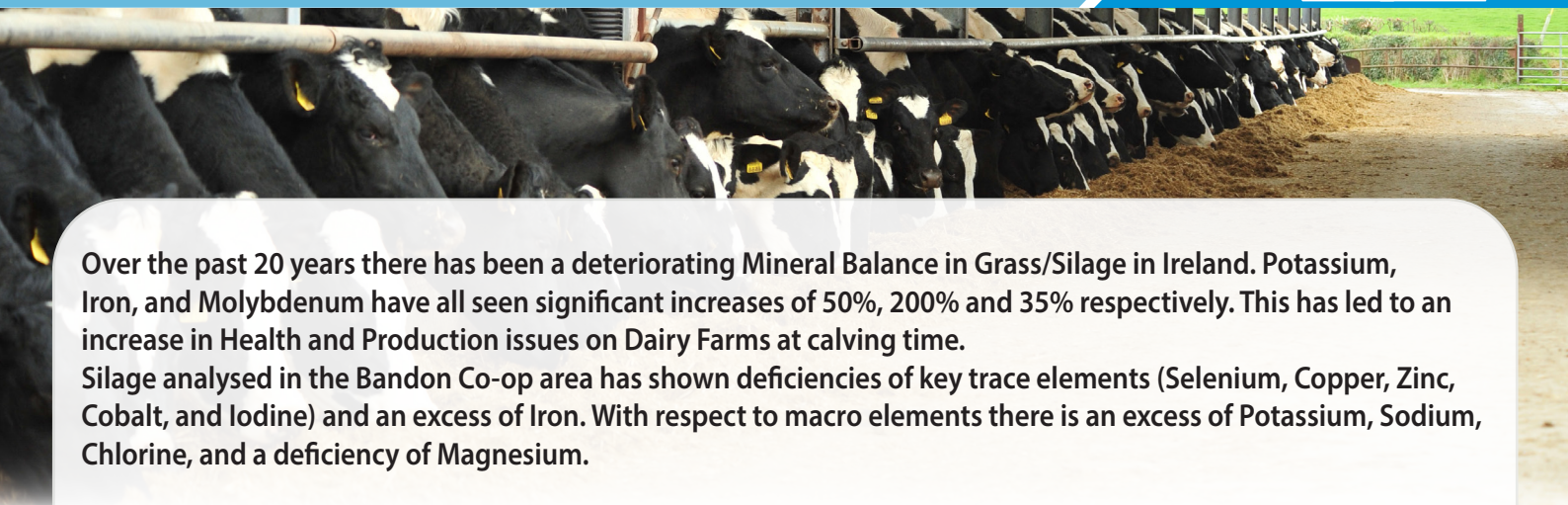
Avoiding metabolic problems and improving general health and disease resistance of both the cow and new-born calf is best achieved through following a quality Dry Cow Mineral Programme. Clinical cases of milk fever are merely the tip of the iceberg, for every clinical case on your farm there are typically 7 to 9 sub-clinical cases that are never diagnosed on your farm.



Times more likely with Clinical or Sub-clinical Milk Fever



Successful prevention of Milk Fever will substantially reduce the risk of many other problems.



Over the past 20 years there has been a deteriorating Mineral Balance in Grass/Silage in Ireland. Potassium, Iron, and Molybdenum have all seen significant increases of 50%, 200% and 35% respectively. This has led to an increase in Health and Production issues on Dairy Farms at calving time.

Silage analysed in the Bandon Co-op area has shown deficiencies of key trace elements (Selenium, Copper, Zinc, Cobalt, and Iodine) and an excess of Iron. With respect to macro elements there is an excess of Potassium, Sodium, Chlorine, and a deficiency of Magnesium.

The Bandon Co-op Dry Cow Mineral Range is designed to offer the customer choices and balances to match their requirements. If you have any questions, please contact your local Bandon Co-op sales representative.

Element	What it effects
Magnesium	Milk Fever
Copper	Fertility, Immunity, Production
Zinc	SCC, Lameness, Mastitis, Production
Selenium	SCC, Mastitis, Retained cleanings
Iodine	Weak Calves, Embryonic Deaths
Cobalt	Vitamin B synthesis, appetite
Manganese	Fertility (embryo survival)
Vitamin A	Retained cleanings, Immunity
Vitamin D	Milk Fever, Immunity
Vitamin E	Immunity, Colostrum quality, SCC

If there is a history of health issues such as milk fever at calving, test the mineral content of the forage now. High potassium (K) silage can often be the cause of the problem. Target to feed a low-K silage (<2%) from four weeks pre-calving.

Close Up Dry Cow Feeding Guidelines

Move cows into close up group 3 weeks pre-calving

- Feed close-up group the lowest DCAB forage available. High DCAB silages (forage with high potassium and/or high sodium content) need careful management and supplementation to ensure the prevention of milk fever:
 - Target forage DCAB level for dry cows is < 150 meq/kg
 - Dry Cow Salts may need to be fed to counteract high DCAB forages.
- Do not feed close up group rape or kale – high potassium
- Dry cow supplements need to be fed twice daily as magnesium is not stored in the body for longer than 10-12 hours, eg. Morning and evening. Magnesium aids milk fever prevention.