



## Tactics for Tight Times

# Winter management

Successful winter management requires planning, monitoring and taking action. This Tactics for Tight Times (TFTT) checklist will help you formulate a plan for winter, with information to help you to make sound business decisions. All options will have a potential upside and a downside so seek further information or advice if you are unsure. Remember, it can be easy to cut expenditure, but harder to identify how this will impact on your overall margin, in the coming year and in the future. This is where the real value of your support team kicks in.

### 1. Knowing your situation



Use the TFTT Fact Sheet 'Taking Stock of your situation'



Connect with your support team. Keep communication lines open with your bank, major suppliers and creditors and update them as appropriate.



Ask your milk factory for an updated income estimation for May and June.



Register to use [DairyBase](#) – it will assist with annual budgeting and analysing farm performance.



Prepare a normal operating conditions Annual Cash Budget and identify areas you think you can improve. You can use DairyBase or the Taking Stock tool to help you do this.



If you need further help sign up for a 1:1 Taking Stock session through your Regional Development Program (RDP) via the [TFTT website](#).

### 2. Looking after yourself and your people



Talk with those around you. Others will be dealing with similar issues.



Get involved in events through your RDP.



If you employ people, keep your staff fully informed and supported.



If you need to reduce hours or make staff changes, keep people safe and be aware of your compliance responsibilities:  
[www.thepeopleindairy.org.au/eski](http://www.thepeopleindairy.org.au/eski)



Don't drop the relief milker! It may be the relief that everyone needs.

### 3. Maximising value from home-grown and purchased foods

-  Balance your grazing rotation with seasonal conditions and your calving pattern.
-  Check leaf stage and residuals as animals graze paddocks.
-  Aim to have the rotation extended out by early to mid-June (depending on leaf emergence rates for your region).
-  Develop a feed budget for feeding milking cows and other stock. Cost feeds on an energy basis.
-  Effective use of nitrogen can be a relatively cheap source of additional winter feed. Check out the [TFTT Winter Nitrogen fact sheet](#) and the [Fert\\$mart website](#).
-  Review concentrate feeding levels and formulations.
-  Use the [Dairy Australia Hay and Grain report](#) to monitor prices and availability.
-  Control weeds and pests in your pastures.

### 4. Trimming costs across the business

-  Go through your budget line by line to identify potential cost savings.
-  Consider applying no PKS if soil nutrient levels are currently above optimal ranges. Redirect fertiliser spending to correcting deficiencies, especially K.
-  Remove unhealthy or less productive cows and sell excess heifers. Consider culling older animals and those with poorer production, low fertility, recurrent mastitis or lameness.
-  Get quotes for everything and consider re-negotiating electricity contracts.

### 5. Managing herd health and welfare

-  Use herd testing or other measures of cow performance to ensure feed resources are directed towards the most productive animals and assist in culling decisions.
-  Dry off cows carefully. Make sure that teat ends are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before application of intramammary antibiotic or internal teat sealant. Refer to the [Dairy Australia shed guides](#).
-  Look after young stock – re-check [calf and heifer liveweight targets](#) and plan to achieve growth rate targets during winter.
-  Look after cows during the transition from dry period to lactation – maintain your [Transition Cow Management \(TCM\)](#) program if possible.
-  Pick your bulls from the [Good Bulls Guide or App](#) – there are good bulls for every budget.

### Tips for knowing your situation

The TFTT fact sheet: ‘Taking Stock of your situation’ takes you through a process that will help you to understand your current situation, including the farm performance, your financial situation and what’s happening with the people in your business. Go to [www.tfft.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.tfft.dairyaustralia.com.au).

If you need more support, consider registering for Taking Stock. This is delivered one-on-one, over the kitchen table, to assist farmers to identify where they are now and what the next, most important decisions are for them. Taking Stock helps assess the cash and profit position, and also looks at a range of key issues including understanding and managing your budget, identifying cost saving options, calculating pasture consumption, managing debt and your balance sheet, understanding additional support services that can be accessed, including counselling and health services, and creating an action plan. Taking Stock has been delivered to over 3,000 dairy farm families across the dairy industry since 2004. Register for a Taking Stock session through your RDP – [www.tfft.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.tfft.dairyaustralia.com.au).

DairyBase is a web-based tool that enables dairy framers to measure and compare their farm business performance over time. It enables dairy farmers to create annual reports and forecasts, identifying opportunities to drive profit and reduce risk and make more informed business decisions. Register for DairyBase at [www.dairybase.com.au](http://www.dairybase.com.au).

### Tips for looking after yourself and your people

Taking care of yourself, your family, staff, neighbours and running your farm business means staying healthy and balanced. Fatigue and stress can make it difficult to make smart decisions or to manage people well.

Managing people through tight times can be challenging – situations can change quickly and this can impact on both employee requirements and expectations. If you employ people, the current situation may impact on their future employment within your farm business. It’s important to keep the lines of the communication open so your staff feel informed and supported.

For more information on managing through tough times, please visit the [People in Dairy website](#).

Get involved in workshops through your RDP or community activities like the VFF/UDV Look Over the Farm Gate, sporting activities or groups like the Young Dairy Network or a discussion group.

## Tips for maximising value from home grown and purchased feeds

By winter the ideal rotation length will be between 45 and 75 days dependent on leaf emergence rates (15–25 days) for your region. Aim to have the rotation extended to 50 days by early mid/June. If you can hold a 50 day round it will get you to the end of July, a 30–35 day round from late July will get you to early September from which point clear improvement in pasture growth rates may be seen.

Balance your grazing rotation with seasonal conditions and your calving pattern. If you dry off all or most cows and destock the farm for a period in winter, you may be able adopt a more aggressive grazing strategy now. If you milk cows through winter make sure to plan for the feed demand from pasture in winter.

The extra feed inputs required may come from using nitrogen to increase growth rates on paddocks with improved species, adequate moisture and no pasture pests, introducing existing and newly sown annual crops into the rotation, feeding out existing fodder supplies, purchasing extra fodder or grain/concentrates to fill the feed gap, and/or sourcing agistment for dry and young stock.

Monitor hay and grain availability, cost and forecasts. The hay and grain report is a weekly, independent assessment of grain and hay markets in each dairying region. It is commissioned by Dairy Australia to provide an independent and timely assessment of hay and grain markets in each dairying region. The report is updated 40 weeks per year and is available free to [download online](#).

## Tips for managing herd health and welfare

Get a Mastitis Focus Report for your herd from your milk company, vet or Herd Improvement organisation to assist with dry off and culling decisions.

Drying off cows correctly minimises the risk of new mastitis cases and ensures maximum value from treatments. To see how this is best done watch the online videos and order your free [Countdown Shed Guides](#). Contact a Countdown adviser to discuss selective use of dry cow therapy - see [Countdown adviser lists](#).

Looking after cows during the transition from dry period to lactation reduces calving difficulties, down cows, mastitis, metritis, lost milk production, poor fertility and involuntary culling. See the [online resources](#) or contact your RDP about Low Stress Calving discussion groups or TCM farmer workshops in your region.

## Regional Development Programs (RDP)



**Dairy NSW**  
Ph: 02 9351 1737  
[dairynsw.com.au](http://dairynsw.com.au)



**Murray Dairy**  
Ph: 03 5833 5312  
[murraydairy.com.au](http://murraydairy.com.au)



**Subtropical Dairy**  
Ph: 0431 197 479  
[dairyinfo.biz](http://dairyinfo.biz)



**WestVic Dairy**  
Ph: 03 55571000  
[westvicdairy.com.au](http://westvicdairy.com.au)



**GippsDairy**  
Ph: 03 5624 3900  
[gippsdairy.com.au](http://gippsdairy.com.au)



**DairySA**  
Ph: 08 8766 0127  
[dairysa.com.au](http://dairysa.com.au)



**DairyTas**  
Ph: 03 6432 2233  
[dairytas.com.au](http://dairytas.com.au)



**Western Dairy**  
Ph: 0429 110 485  
[westerndairy.com.au](http://westerndairy.com.au)

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**Dairy Australia Limited** ABN 60 105 227 987  
Level 5, IBM Centre  
60 City Road, Southbank VIC 3006 Australia  
T + 61 3 9694 3777 F + 61 3 9694 3701  
E [enquiries@dairyaustralia.com.au](mailto:enquiries@dairyaustralia.com.au)  
[dairyaustralia.com.au](http://dairyaustralia.com.au)

