KERRY | DairyIreland

AGRINEWS JANUARY 2026

Milk Markets Update

The first GDT auction of 2026 recorded a 6.3% increase, a notable result and the strongest rise in the index in five years. While this headline figure is significant, a closer examination of the underlying components shows that the increase was largely driven by higher prices for Fonterra products from New Zealand. European-origin products did not experience comparable gains.

Overall, European prices have shown signs of stabilisation following the Christmas period. However, elevated stock levels, particularly in fat products, continue to limit upside potential.

Global Supply

Global milk production remains stronger than previously forecast. Weekly milk collections in Germany and France are running approximately 6% ahead of last year. In contrast, Irish milk production declined by 2.3% in November.

Global Demand

Export demand has improved, supported by increased product availability and more competitive pricing. There has been no meaningful improvement in demand from China; however, demand from Southeast Asia has strengthened. Foodservice demand remains subdued, as ongoing inflationary pressures continue to weigh on consumer spending.

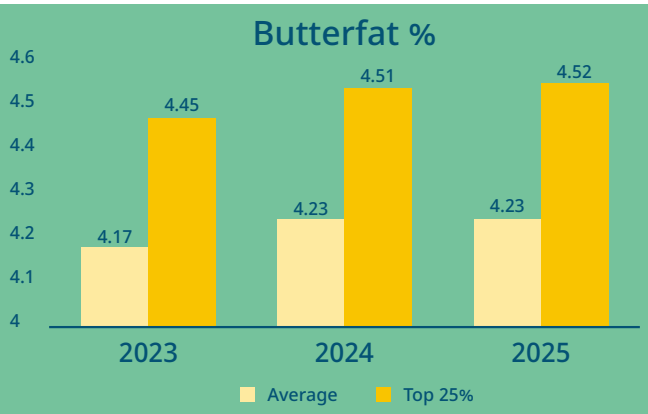
Milk Production Performance in 2025

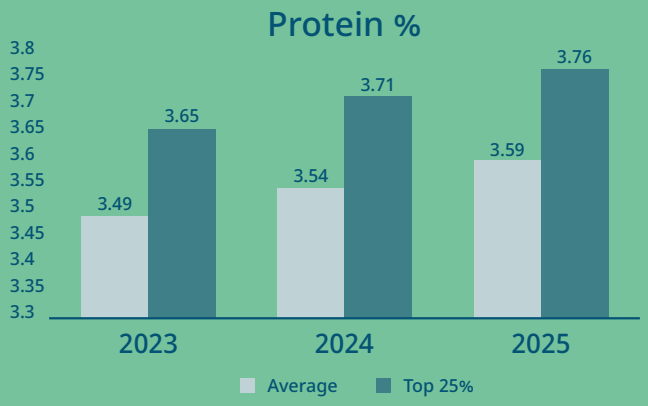
Milk production in 2025 delivered a strong performance, with improved cow productivity contributing to a 5.2% increase in milk volumes supplied to Kerry Dairy Ireland compared with 2024. This growth was supported by a combination of favourable conditions, including an excellent spring for grazing, vigorous grass growth, and relatively stable input costs.

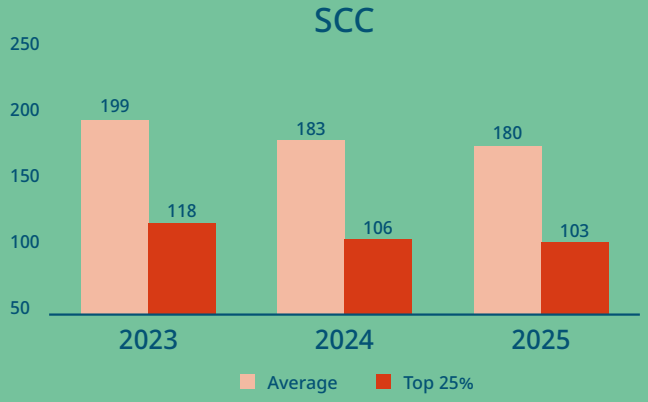
The accompanying graphs outline the average butterfat, protein and Somatic Cell Count (SCC) levels over the past three years, alongside the corresponding results from suppliers in the top 25% for each parameter.

Overall, average butterfat levels in 2025 remained consistent with those recorded in 2024. Notably, the average protein percentage has shown a steady year-on-year improvement, while average SCC levels have continued to decline. These positive trends in protein percentage are likely influenced by advancements in animal genetics, enhanced nutritional management, and improved mid-season grass quality.

The performance of the top 25% of suppliers highlights the significant potential for continued progress. Achieving further gains will require an ongoing focus on enhancing herd genetics, leveraging milk recording insights, and optimising grazing and feed management practices.







Calf Health: Getting the Basics Right

With calving season approaching, focusing on strong calf health is essential, as early-life management underpins lifelong performance. Ensuring good nutrition, hygiene and disease prevention in the first weeks supports healthier, more productive animals.

Key considerations for optimal calf health include:

1. Colostrum Management

- Newborn calves are born without protective antibodies, so early feeding is critical.
- Feed 3–4 litres of high-quality colostrum within two hours of birth to achieve adequate passive immunity.
- Colostrum collected within eight hours of calving contains the highest antibody levels.
- Store colostrum at 4°C for up to 48 hours if not fed immediately; higher temperatures encourage bacterial growth and reduce antibody absorption (Teagasc Moorepark study).

2. Cow Nutrition Before Calving

- Cows should calve down at a body condition score of 3.25.

- Do not restrict feed intake during late pregnancy; energy demands are high due to rapid foetal growth.
- Calves from nutritionally restricted dry cows have poorer immunity and weaker health outcomes.

3. Hygiene

- Clean and disinfect all feeding equipment thoroughly.
- Bacterial contamination reduces the calf's ability to absorb antibodies from colostrum.

4. Transition Milk

- Transition milk (milkings 2–6) contains higher antibody levels than whole milk and supports early immune development.
- Avoid pooling colostrum or transition milk in herds with known Johne's disease risks.

5. Early Nutrition for Calves

- Provide fresh, clean water from the first week of life.
- Offer starter concentrates early to support rumen development, helping calves achieve strong early growth and a smoother weaning transition.

Bloom Feeds Calf Milk Replacer Range

Bloom Feeds has launched its own brand of calf milk replacer. The benefits of using a calf milk replacer include greater nutritional consistency, lower risk of spreading of diseases and decreased risk of a buildup of antimicrobial resistance within the farm gate. Once a milk replacer is selected a structured feeding plan can be put in place to achieve the calf's daily growth targets. The Bloom Feeds Calf Milk Replacer range can be broken down into Skim and Whey based products.

Topmilk 60 is a premium brand Skim based milk replacer. Its contains 60% skim content with 100% dairy protein being used. The use of dairy protein allows for easier digestibility in comparison to vegetable-based protein sources. The benefits of using a high skim content milk replacer is that skim contains an enzyme that allows for clotting to occur in the stomach of the calf leaving the calf feeling fuller for longer. Topmilk 60 is 24% crude protein with an 18% fat content. It also contains probiotics and oregano to aid immunity. Topmilk 60 is suitable for once-a-day feeding due to slow casein digestion

Topmilk 40 is a skim-based milk replacer with a 40% skim content. The protein being used is 100% dairy protein which aids digestion for the young calf. Topmilk 40 is 22% protein and 20% fat content. Also suitable for once-a-day feeding due to slow casein digestion.

Topmilk Heifer is a high protein whey-based milk replacer that is ideal for lean muscle development of dairy replacement heifers. Topmilk heifer is 26% protein and 18% fat content. Ideal for heifer rearing programs aiming for rapid growth and early concentrate intake. Topmilk heifer is suitable for twice a day feeding programmes.

Topmilk is a whey-based milk replacer using high quality dairy-based protein sources. It's a 23% protein and 20% fat content milk replacer. Topmilk is ideal as a general-purpose milk replacer which can be used both for replacement heifers and beef bred calves. Topmilk uses probiotics and a protected mineral pack to meet the growing calf's requirements.

Please contact your local Sales Liaison Manager to discuss selecting a suitable milk replacer for your farm.

Chemical and Organic Nutrient Application Strategies for Spring

2026 Reopening dates for spreading organic and chemical fertiliser		
Zone	**Chemical Fertilisers**	**Organic Fertiliser**
A (Cork, Tipperary, & Waterford)	27th of January 2026	13th of January 2026
B (Kerry, Limerick, Clare, & Galway)	30th of January 2026	16th of January 2026

When the prohibited periods have ended and conditions are suitable, the first round of nutrient applications typically involves either a straight nitrogen (N) chemical fertiliser or slurry. For waterlogged soils, nutrients should not be applied until sufficient drying has occurred and soil temperatures have reached at least 6 °C.

While cattle slurry provides valuable N, phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), nitrogen remains the key nutrient in the first round. An early-season application of 1,500–2,000 gallons per acre is recommended. Suitable areas for slurry application include fields grazed last in 2025. Ideally, slurry should be prioritised for fields with low P and K indices.

Chemical fertiliser rates do not need to be high in early spring. Apply small amounts of straight N, typically **25 kg/ha (20–25 units per acre)**, on fields that did not receive slurry.

As grass growth improves from mid-March, phosphorus becomes increasingly important. In the second round, where a P allowance exists, low P and K index soils should be targeted with a compound fertiliser if they did not receive slurry in the first round. Spread the equivalent of **30–35 units of straight N per acre** during this phase.

Maintaining an approximate **10:1 ratio of nitrogen to sulphur** in the sward is also essential. As growth increases in March, grass N uptake rises along with the demand for sulphur. It is important to apply sulphur at this point and continue to supply it gradually every two to three rounds until the end of June.

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