



## Markets Overview

In recent weeks, European butter prices experienced a brief increase of several hundred euros before easing back again. With inventories remaining high, recent movements appear to be driven more by market sentiment than by underlying fundamentals. Skim Milk Powder (SMP) prices, however, are showing strong global momentum, with the first February GDT auction recording a 10.6% rise. Cheddar prices in Europe have stabilised at lower levels, making European cheese more competitive than New Zealand product and drawing increased interest from importers.

### Global Supply

Milk production continues to outperform earlier forecasts across key regions. In Europe, it is estimated

that one-third of the growth is linked to late calving following last year's blue tongue outbreak. In New Zealand, pasture growth from October to December was below average, but record-high imports of Palm Kernel Extract supported milk output. Pasture growth improved significantly in January, and strong production is expected to continue into February. Meanwhile, cow numbers in the United States are at record highs, ensuring sustained milk flow.

### Global Demand

Export demand has strengthened, supported by increased product availability and more competitive pricing. While Chinese demand remains subdued, markets across Southeast Asia are showing clear signs of improvement.

## Setting the Season Up for Success with Early Milk Recording

Brian O'Shea, Oliver Cunningham and Olive Cunningham O'Shea farm 82 dairy cows in Raheenagh, Co. Limerick, where a strong commitment to hygiene, udder health and consistent milk recording has delivered outstanding results. Their focus on excellence earned them a CellCheck Award in 2024, and this high standard continued in 2025, with the herd achieving an impressive average SCC of just 59,000 SCC/ml.

Housing management is a key priority on the farm. Cubicles are limed twice daily, kept clean and maintained to ensure every cow has adequate space. "The first step in preventing mastitis is making sure cows are in a clean, comfortable environment," explains Brian, who also highlights early turnout to grass as an important factor in keeping cows cleaner.

At milking time, post-milking teat spraying is firmly embedded as standard practice, helping ensure cows leave the parlour protected and reducing the risk of new infections.

Early identification of high-SCC cows is central to the herd's mastitis control strategy. Cows are monitored daily for clinical signs, with CMT testing used to pinpoint infected quarters when issues arise. "Treatment is far more effective when you can identify the infected quarter early and target it directly," Brian notes.

Regular and early milk recording is another cornerstone of the farm's approach. Brian plans to complete six recordings this year, beginning in late February. This early data helps identify any issues emerging post-dry period and supports informed decisions around Selective Dry Cow Therapy.



Brian O'Shea, Ollie O'Shea and Oliver Cunningham

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## Focusing on the Fundamentals for a Stronger Season Ahead

With milk prices remaining under pressure, maintaining profitability relies on disciplined cost management, strong herd performance and maximising grass utilisation. Key recommendations include:

### 1. Prioritise Cost Control

Focus on reducing the main controllable cash costs without undermining productivity: feed & concentrates; fertiliser; contracting services and repairs and maintenance. Apply savings sensibly to ensure animal performance and output are not compromised.

### 2. Optimise Cow Health & Nutrition

- Maintain adequate body condition throughout lactation.
- Feed high-quality silage to milking cows when required.
- Provide appropriate mineral supplementation.
- Support overall herd health to avoid preventable yield losses.

### 3. Prioritise Quality

Keep key quality indicators consistently low to maximise returns: SCC, TBC & Thermodurics

### 4. Maximise Grass Utilised - The Foundation of Low-Cost Production

- Apply early nitrogen to stimulate spring grass growth.
- Get cows out grazing – whenever conditions allow.

### 5. Strengthen Financial Discipline

- Postpone non-essential investment.
- Review loan repayment schedules.
- Monitor expenditure against budget regularly.

Top-performing farms succeed by doing the basics exceptionally well. Technical excellence, disciplined financial management, and consistently strong grass utilisation enable farmers to protect margins.



# Selecting the Right Feed for Your Herd This Spring

This spring, Kerry Dairy Ireland is providing enhanced on-farm nutrition support to milk suppliers through the expertise of our nutritionists, Bernard Stack and Katie O'Brien. As part of this service, our nutrition team conducts on-farm testing of both grass silage and fresh grass to assess key nutrient values. These results form the foundation of a tailored nutrition programme designed to match the specific needs of your herd throughout the grazing season.

Understanding the nutritional profile of your forages (dry matter, crude protein and UFL) enables our nutritionists to recommend the most appropriate feed to support herd performance. By combining forage analysis with current milk production data, the team can create a precise, evidence-based feeding plan aimed at helping you achieve your production targets for the year.

One supplier benefitting from this service is Fiachra Liston, who milks 300 cows in East Limerick. Fiachra receives regular visits during the year, with his herd's nutrition plan updated as new forage test results become available. Whenever he transitions from one silage pit to another, a member of the nutrition team completes on-site testing so that the herd's diet can be adjusted immediately. Reflecting on his experience, Fiachra notes: **"If you can't measure the quality of your silage, then it is impossible to gauge how much meal you should be feeding. Testing the silage and grass quality on a regular basis has allowed the herd to have a balanced diet throughout the year."**

This data-driven, on-farm approach ensures feed decisions are made with greater accuracy, supporting herd health, performance and efficiency throughout the season.

If you would like to arrange a farm visit from one of our nutritionists, please contact your local Sales Liaison Manager.



Fiachra Liston

# Cheestrings at 30: Celebrating Three Decades of Fun, Real Cheese & Real Nutrition

This year marks a major milestone for Cheestrings as the brand turns 30. For three decades, Cheestrings has been a lunchbox favourite, loved by children for its peelable fun and trusted by parents for its dairy goodness. As we celebrate this anniversary, it's the perfect moment to reflect on what makes Cheestrings the household favourite it is today.

Rooted in dairy goodness, at the core of every Cheestring is **real cheese** made from a **whole glass of milk**. To achieve Cheestrings' signature "stringy" texture, real cheese is gently heated and stretched through a process similar to mozzarella making. This unmistakable, peelable deliciousness has delighted generation after generation and helped cement Cheestrings' place within the nation's lunchboxes.

## Did you Know?

1. **Each 20g, individually wrapped string contains 156mg of calcium, which is proven to support healthy bone development in growing children.**
2. **Cheestrings are also fortified with vitamins B6, B12 and D which contribute to the normal functioning of the immune system.**
3. **Cheestrings are naturally high in protein, with 4.6g of protein per portion, and contain around 30% less fat than Cheddar.**

Their individually wrapped format provides built-in portion control that aligns with how families typically consume cheese and helps parents manage snacking easily and sensibly.

**With just 61 kcal per Cheestring and only 0.2g of sugars**, they offer a balanced alternative to less healthy snacks we know children also enjoy. Combined with their clean, dairy-led ingredient list, containing no artificial colours, flavours, or preservatives Cheestrings provide a delicious yet fun way to snack.

This combination of nutrition and fun explains Cheestrings' longstanding place as a trusted, family-friendly staple and, as the brand enters its fourth decade, the fun continues...

This year we are launching refreshed packaging which will shine an even brighter spotlight on the health benefits of Cheestrings as it remains the playful, nutritious and convenient snacking option we all know and love.

**Happy Birthday Cheestrings - here's to next 30 years of making good food fun!**



## SUPPORT WHAT'S YOURS GROW WHAT'S NEXT

With over **50 Years'** experience in  
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