



# GOLDEN RULES FOR DRY COWS

**By Vicky Ham**

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The dry period represents the biggest opportunity to make or break the next lactation. If you ask yourself: “do I have a dry cow problem?” You’ll probably say NO. But if you were to ask yourself instead: “could my dry cow management, be better?” Your answer should always be - YES!

Historically, the non-lactating period was always considered as unprofitable, with dry cows often left forgotten in unsuitable housing conditions as the milking cows were prioritised. Thankfully, modern-day thinking and research has turned our attitude towards dry cows completely around and we now understand that this is the most profitable period. Why? Because how we manage the cow during this period sets her up for success in the next lactation. Equally, this is the period where most costs can also occur, but our investment in both time and money can deliver the greatest return on investment after she’s calved.

Typically varying in length anywhere from 45 to 60 days, the dry period has many uses. Firstly, it provides a period of rest with lower levels of physical and metabolic activity in the lead up to calving. Secondly, it’s an opportunity for antibiotic therapy to treat subclinical mastitis infections. And thirdly, while the cow is not being milked, her mammary cells can renew at a faster rate, leading to increased milk production in her next lactation.

As an experienced dairy cattle nutritionist, I’ve seen the impact a sound transition management plan can have on transforming a herd’s overall performance. It is the first place I look at whenever I visit a farm, quickly followed by the silage clamps.

Follow my ‘Ten Golden Rules’ to set up a seamless transition into lactation:

1. Have accurate fertility records to ensure cows are not in the dry cow pen for an extended stay.
2. Target body condition score of 3.0 – 3.5 at dry off and maintain steady condition throughout the dry period.
3. Feed mould-free forage and straw, ensuring all feed troughs are clean before fresh feed is fed.
4. Provide 85-100cm feed space per cow, 80cm for far off dry cows.
5. Target a minimum daily intake of 13 kgs dry matter. This can be difficult to measure as cows enter and leave the pen so check rumen fill scores as well.
6. Provide clean, deep bedding for maximum cow comfort and cleanliness (will help avoid mastitis infections starting in dry period).
7. Provide good ventilation and minimise heat stress.
8. Always formulate the diet using accurate and up to date forage mineral analysis.
9. Choose an appropriate strategy to deal with both clinical and sub-clinical hypocalcaemia, such as feeding the protein-based DCAD solution bio-chlor.
10. Balance the diet with healthy levels of antioxidants, Vitamin D and additional magnesium.



**Vicky Ham** is the Ruminant Technical Service Manager covering Europe for Arm & Hammer Animal Nutrition. Prior to joining Arm & Hammer, Vicky spent several years working as an on-farm dairy nutrition advisor across the Southwest of England and beyond. Her special areas of interest are in dry cow management, mineral nutrition and milk fatty acid composition.