

Farmers' verdict on controlling flies

Choosing the right farming equipment or service is about making choices you can trust. That is why honest, experience-based feedback from fellow farmers is so valuable. British Dairying and Kingshay bring the results from the latest Tried and Tested report.

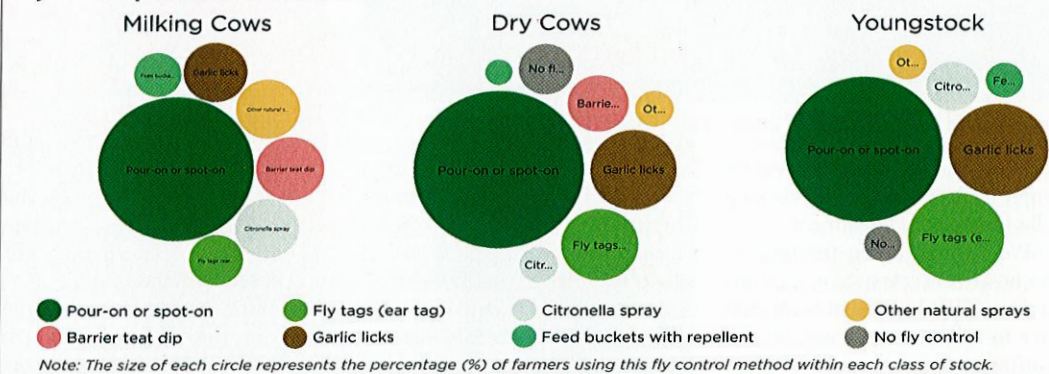
Fly control is a crucial aspect not only of herd health and comfort, but also in reducing the nuisance to staff working in and around cattle. Although a greater problem in the summer, flies can continue to be an annoying presence into the British winter. So what can farmers do to tackle them?

In the third of our British Dairying / Kingshay Tried and Tested reports, we asked for your feedback on the most trusted option for fly control, reflecting real-world use of different products. Previous reports have explored technologies like cow wearables and automated calf feeders (see British Dairying's May and August 2025 issues).

"Farmers gain confidence when they know others have had success with a product," says Sarah Bolt, Technical Knowledge Exchange Manager at Kingshay. "It helps them feel assured that they are making a well-informed choice, not just taking a chance."

Fly control on farms can target both the animals and their environment. Pour-on insecticides and treated ear tags offer several weeks of protection, while natural alternatives, like citronella sprays and essential oils, are gaining popularity. Environmental measures like cleaning sheds, managing grazing areas, and using fans, traps, or biological controls like parasitic wasps, can significantly reduce fly populations and improve cow welfare. To ensure thorough coverage, the survey included all these elements. Fifty farmers - representing a diverse range of herd sizes and dairy systems - provided valuable insights into fly control practices across the UK.

Fly control practices - animal-based



Pour on and spot on treatments are by far the most commonly used form of fly control across all types of stock

The findings highlight the range of methods used in different areas around the farm and livestock groups, from milking cows to dry cows and youngstock. Farmers shared their experiences with various control strategies, evaluating their effectiveness in real-world conditions. Their feedback offers a practical, grounded perspective on what works best, helping others make informed decisions.

On average, farmers use fly control methods for around four months of the year, with durations ranging from one to six months. Some begin as early as April, though the majority start in May. Most farms stop fly control in September, with a gradual decline into October (see graph). When it comes to keeping flies off cattle on dairy farms, pour-on and spot-on treatments are by far the most commonly used method across all types of stock. The survey found 92% of farmers using them on milking cows, 78% on dry cows, and almost 70% on youngstock (see figure). After pour-ons, the second most

popular fly control method varies depending on the type of animal. For milking cows, barrier test dips came in second, with 12% of farmers using them. Close behind were citronella sprays, other plant-based repellents, and garlic licks, each used by around 10% of farmers.

Varying methods

Importantly, every farmer surveyed said they use at least one form of fly control on their milking cows. For dry cows, garlic licks were the second most popular option, used by 20% of farmers. Fly tags (ear tags containing insecticide) came in third (16%). Interestingly, the same pattern showed up for youngstock; garlic licks were used by 28% of farmers, and fly tags by 26%.

The results showed that building and grazing management strategies remain less used than animal-based control methods. Many farmers report no environmental fly control in specific areas of the farm, which is understandable where adult

stock are kept outdoors during peak fly season, or where buildings like calving sheds and youngstock housing are empty due to seasonal block calving systems.

Among those who do implement environmental measures, keeping cubicle sheds clear of slurry is the most common practice - adopted by 46% of respondents. Over one-third of farms maintain clean feed troughs across all building types. Fly papers; an affordable and effective solution, are widely used, particularly in milking parlours (over 40%) and youngstock sheds (26%). Fly traps and lights are also popular, with 30% of parlours and 24% of youngstock buildings using them.

In terms of grazing management, 62% of farmers take no additional steps to control flies, while 20% avoid wet, low-lying fields, and just 10% avoid grazing near woodland. Surprisingly, 10% of farmers choose to graze only at night during peak fly periods. While this figure may seem high, it could reflect the exceptionally

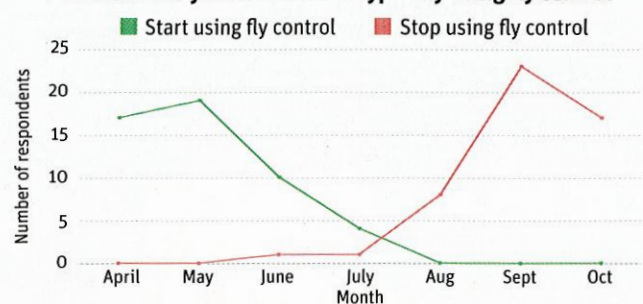
Fly control and summary

Flies are more than just a nuisance; they spread disease, cause stress, and reduce feed intake, all of which negatively impact animal performance. Effective fly management is not merely about pest control; it plays a vital role in maintaining herd health and overall farm productivity.

Good fly control can lead to improved feed conversion in calves and increased milk yield in the milking herd, while also helping to prevent infections - like New Forest Eye and summer mastitis. And while chemical treatments remain widely used and effective, natural and integrated approaches are proving successful on some farms. These methods offer a balanced combination of efficacy, cost-efficiency, and farmer satisfaction.

The findings suggest that although some environmental controls are being adopted, there is still considerable potential for broader implementation across the sector. Further insights and analysis will be available in Kingshay's full Tried and Tested report.

Months of the year farmers are typically using fly control

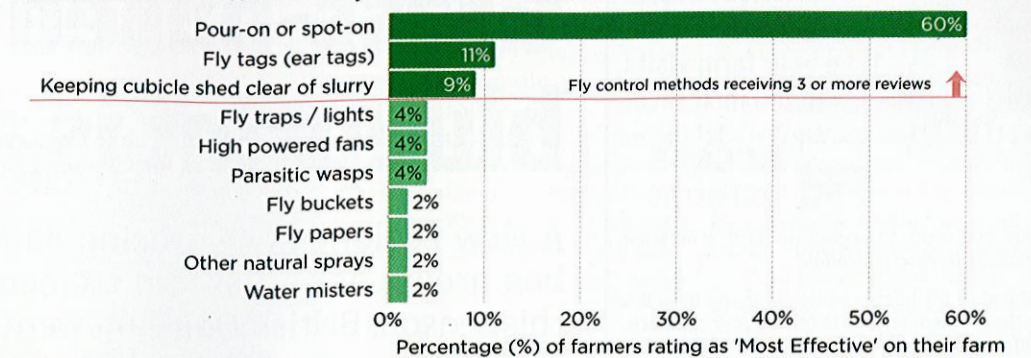


The majority of fly control starts in May and stops in September/October

hot conditions experienced this summer, when cows were brought indoors during the day to reduce heat stress in unshaded fields. Farmers were asked to identify the most effective method of fly control on their farms.

As expected, the most frequently used products - pour-on or spot-on treatments - were also rated as the most effective, with 60% of respondents selecting them as their top choice (see graph). From a farmer's perspective, pour-ons and spot-ons are also considered good

Farmer rated the most effective fly control on their farm



Win £100 by sharing your views

We invite all farmers to take part in the next Tried and Tested survey: Silage additives for grass silage.

Do you use a silage additive on your grass silage? If so, we want to hear from you. Your insights will contribute to a review that helps farmers across the industry make informed choices, explains Sarah. "By sharing your experiences, you'll help build a vital, independent resource for the whole dairy community, providing honest, evidence-based detail, grounded in everyday farming reality."

To take part visit <https://bit.ly/BDTTSilage>

Everyone completing a survey will be entered into a prize draw to win a £100 Amazon voucher and can receive a copy of the full report, normally reserved for Kingshay members.

The lucky winner of the £100 voucher for the fly control survey was Tiggy Grove from Wiltshire - congratulations!

value for money, and are highly likely to be recommended to others. However, it's worth noting that although fewer farmers use fly tags, 11% of respondents rated them as the most effective method.

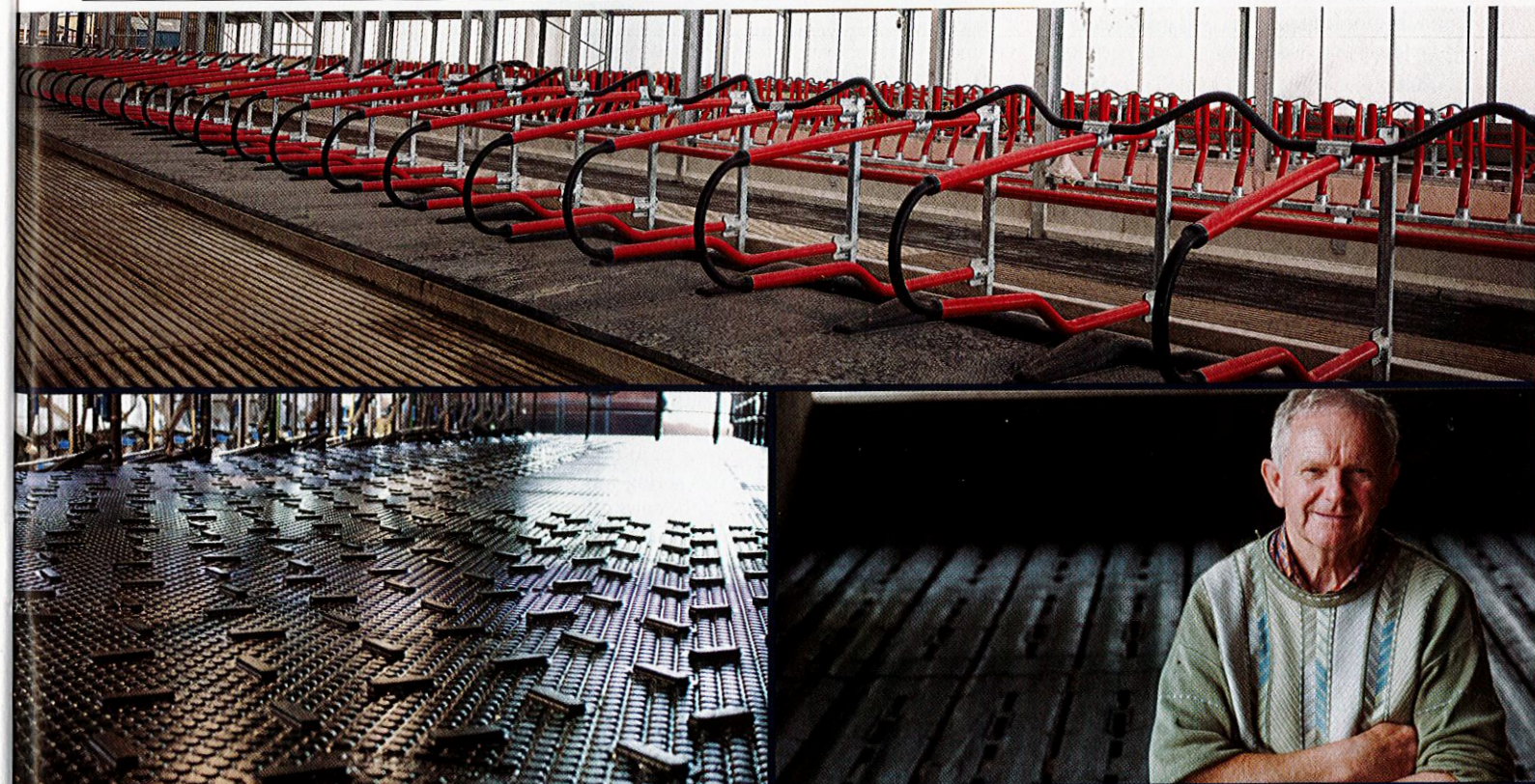
Interestingly, fly tags scored higher than pour-ons and spot-ons in terms of value for money and likelihood of recommendation. Keeping sheds clear of slurry was rated most effective by 9% of farmers.

While this approach should not be overlooked, its perceived value for money and recommendation score may be impacted by the high costs associated with diesel and labour. Alternative methods, like fly papers,

natural sprays, and parasitic wasps, stood out for their top scores in both value for money and likelihood of recommendation.

Although these methods received fewer responses, they are clearly appreciated for their affordability and practical benefits where used.

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