

Herd replacement systems

Modern dairy herd replacement regimes can, essentially, be divided into five systems (**Table 1**).

The most suitable system for a particular herd depends primarily on the availability of the three most important herd constraints:

- Labour
- Land
- Buildings.

A structured approach involving a separate appraisal of each constraint is valuable in choosing between the options (**Figures 1, 2 & 3**).

Table 1: Modern dairy herd replacement systems

System	Description	Considerations
1: Low Input Rearing	Extensive rearing on less demanding rations to calve at 27-28 months of age.	Low labour requirement. Useful where surplus buildings and/or land are available.
2: Medium Input Rearing	Rearing on good leys and grass silage to calve at 24-25 months of age.	Higher labour requirement. Needs good grassland management and sufficient land.
3: High Input Rearing	Intensive rearing on quality rations to calve at 22-24 months of age.	Most demanding targets. Fewer animals reduces labour and land requirements.
4: Contract Rearing	Sending home-bred heifers to a specialist rearer on contract.	Needs no land, labour or buildings. Requires good contract and trust in rearer.
5: Flying Herd	Buying-in all replacements as close-to calving or down-calving heifers.	Needs no land, labour or buildings. Allows all cows to be bred to beef bulls. Exposed to market and biosecurity risks.

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Figure 1: Assessing heifer rearing systems on labour availability

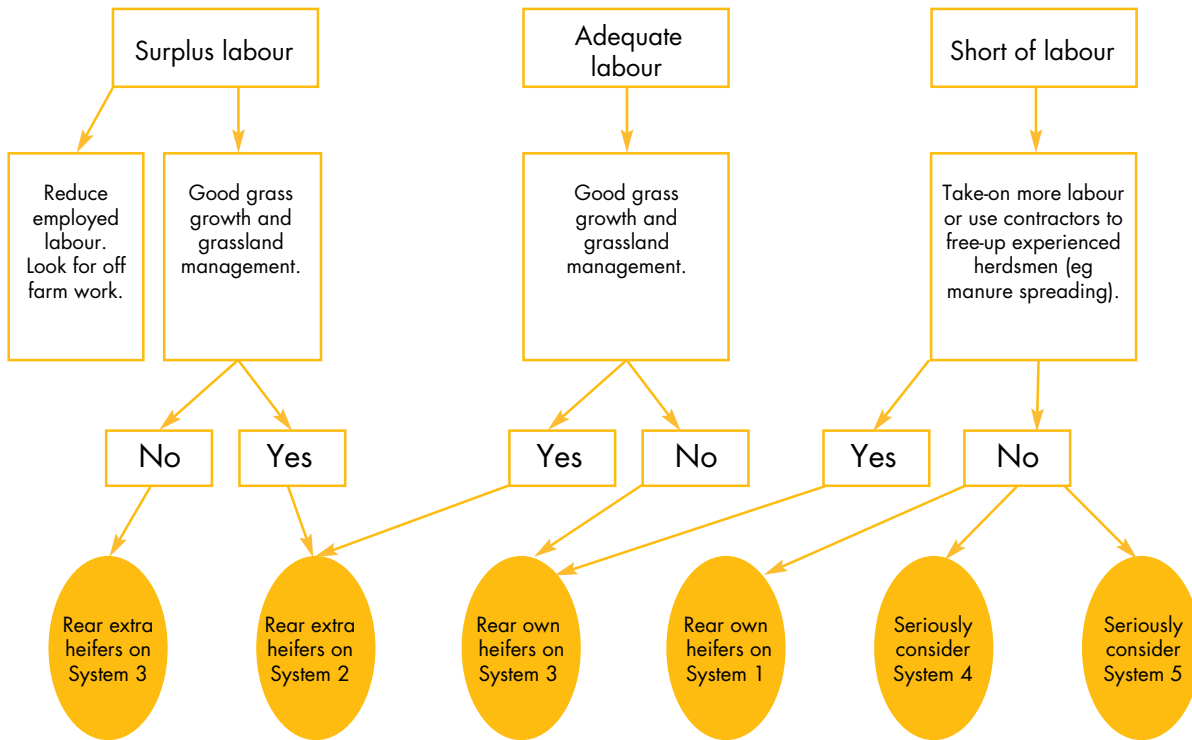


Figure 2: Assessing heifer rearing systems on buildings availability

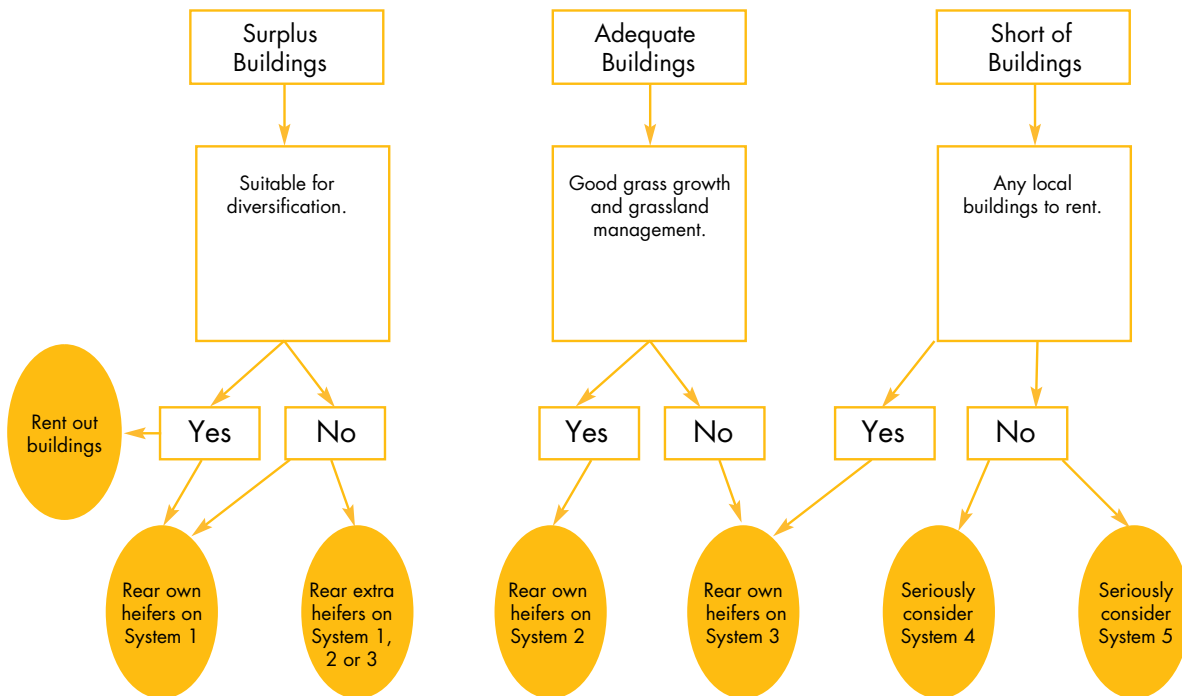
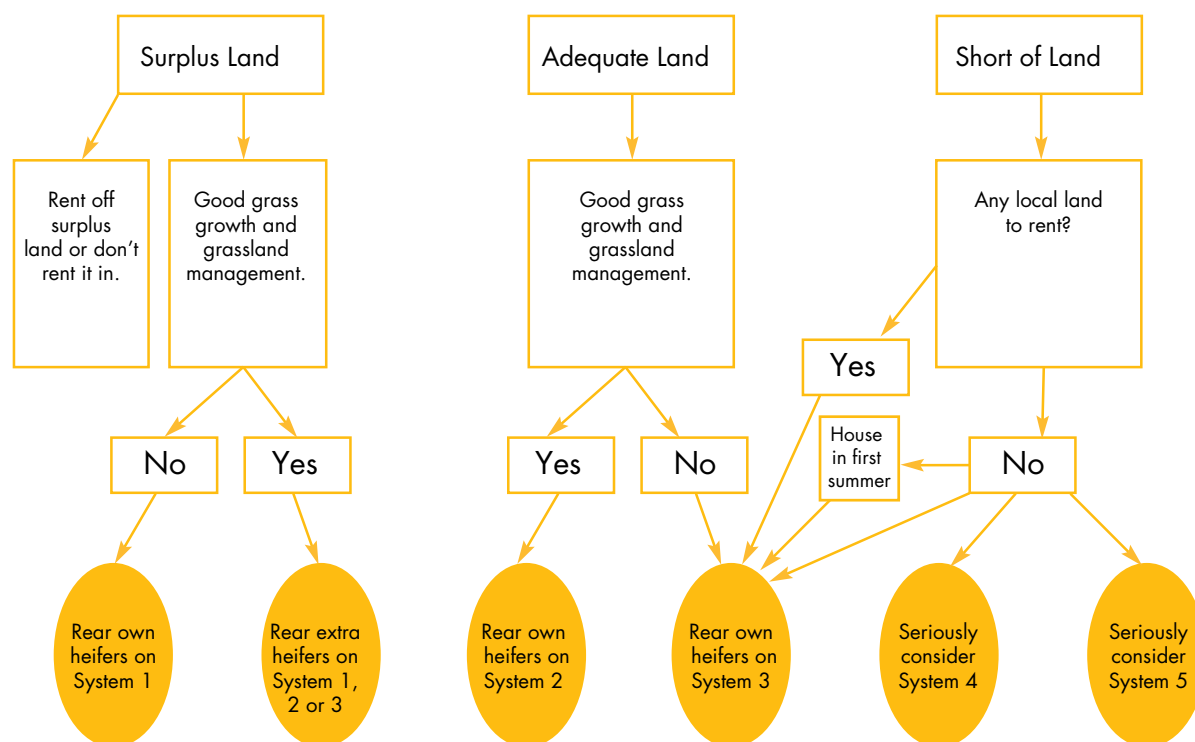


Figure 3: Assessing heifer rearing systems on land availability



The DairyCo heifer rearing workbook is a tool which allows costed comparisons to be made between different systems for specific farm circumstances.