FARM FIRST NEWSLETTER

JULY 2023

Beef Fertility - Better fertility means more profit

Reproductive management of cattle is strongly related to net return:

Fertility efficiency of a beef suckler herd is defined by achieving the maximum output (kg) of saleable beef / breeding cow / year and is commonly measured by calf crop % (number of calves weaned / number of cows mated x 100), the target being >94%.

The crucial stages of this process are:

- CONCEIVING
- CARRYING A CALF TO TERM
- DELIVERING A LIVE CALF
- REARING IT SUCCESSFULLY TO WEANING.

The first step of this process is to get the cows in calf and this can be achieved either by using a bull or AI.

The Bull

Best practice advises that bulls are fertility tested annually 60 days prior to the mating season to ensure they are working effectively. There is often only 1 bull on the farm, any problem with that bull could have a huge financial impact. 60 days are needed for sperm production, so any illness like lameness 2 months ago can have an impact. The average cost of keeping a quality stock bull on farm is: £1,600/year (based on average longevity of 4 working years, depreciation and fixed and variable costs). Few beef bulls sire more than 35 calves/year, therefore cost/calf is £45 (Nadis).

Artificial Insemination (AI) with Synchronisation

Synchronisation more easily enables the use of AI which accelerates genetic gain, and using EBV (value of additive genetic effects) tested bull semen will mean that more focus can be put on specific factors important on individual farms:

- Calving ease
- Depth of muscle
- Lameness
- Growth rates
- Milk production (replacements)
- Sexed semen available to breed replacements
- Reduces disease risk if not buying in bulls

There is also the ability to breed and re-establish cyclicity in anoestrus cows and optimised farm organisation e.g. pregnancy check, calving period, optimal utilisation of resources, food resources.

Synchronisation also results in even batches of calves born, leading to:

- decreased neonatal mortality
- disease prevention planning
- higher profitability at sales

By attention to these areas, reproductive performance can be improved significantly.

If you would like any bulls tested or to find out about synchronisation programs and the use of AI, please contact us at the office.

SAFE CATTLE HANDLING

Every year many accidents occur when handling cattle; this can be due to cattle kicking, gates flying back or crush injuries. Having handling facilities that are well designed and in good working order will improve safety and make tasks easier.

Handling facilities should either be sited on the flat or on a slight incline with the predominant direction of cattle flow uphill. The area should be well-lit with non-slip footing, and no tight turns or sharp edges. Non-slip footing can be achieved with a tamped concrete finish or grooving. For new concrete, consider a hexagon pattern that provides good slip resistance with minimal pressure points on the hoof. To reduce slippage, keep the area clean.

Cattle that have a frightening or painful experience are likely to behave wildly the next time they are handled, while cattle handled in a quiet and gentle manner are more likely to remain calm and easier/safer to work with. Tasks can be frustrating but remaining calm around the cattle makes a huge difference. Cattle rely heavily on visual stimulation and have a wide field of vision, but they have poor distance and depth perception, so they are reluctant to enter dark or shadowy areas. Having the exit towards the field/home pens can help, and avoid direct sun. Solid sides help to keep the cattle focused and moving forwards.

The 'flight zone' is a term describing how close you can get to cattle before they start moving. The flight zone varies depending on what type of cattle you are handling. Entering the cattle's flight zone will get them moving. The closer you get, the faster they will move away, therefore to an extent you can manage their movement speed by how close you get to them. Likewise, to stop them moving, step out of their flight zone. If you're alongside the animal and move forward, it will move backward. If you go back, it will go forward. If you're in front and move to the left, it will move to your right. Understanding cattle movement is key to their handling and you should always try and explain this to new people on the farm.

There are many options for crushes out there. If a suitable system is not available, a mobile crush with an operator can be hired; these systems are easily set up in fields. Squeeze crushes are highly adaptable and are a good investment if you frequently handle cattle of varying sizes. The crush should have a solid stable floor. Ensure the yoke is secure and cannot spring open, as a loose handle may hit an operator on the head. Ensure the crush is attached to a solid object and pins are firmly placed to prevent animals lifting it off the hinges or floor. Having crush side gates that open both sides is beneficial, especially if an animal goes down. To prevent backward movement of the animal, a rump bar can be inserted behind them. Head scoops are useful for bolusing and drenching cattle.

WEANING LAMBS

Several potential problems may arise that require careful monitoring and attention. Here's some key issues to look out for:

Nutrition: Watch for signs of malnutrition or deficiencies, such as poor growth, dull coats, or weight loss.

Parasites: Lambs are highly susceptible to internal and external parasites. Keep a close eye on their faecal consistency and growth rates; perform regular worm egg counts, to see if worming is indicated.

Disease: Weaned lambs may be vulnerable to various diseases, such as respiratory infections or clostridial diseases. Monitor for symptoms like coughing, nasal discharge, or sudden deaths, and investigate the cause if these occur.

Stress-related issues: The weaning process itself can cause stress to lambs, making them more susceptible to health problems such as pasteurellosis.

Pasture management: Lambs should have access to clean grazing such as hay or silage aftermath.

For Welsh farms, a Farming Connect programme is available to fund investigations into these issues. Taking actions in advance of the weaning period can reduce the risks of issues occurring.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

RAM VASECTOMY DAY

Tuesday 11th July

AT THE SURGERY

10% off vasectomies, further discounts on additional rams

£84 + VAT first/individual ram
£72 + VAT additional rams

RAM FERTILITY TESTING

Full examination includes:
TEETH • TOES • TESTICAL EXAMINATION
• TONE-BODY CONDITION SCORE
• SEMEN TESTING

Full fertility examination - £76 + VAT
Basic fertilty test - £40 + VAT
Further discounts for additional rams

NEW RAMS - POST PURCHASE
SALE RAMS - PRE-SALE
STOCK RAMS - PRE-BREEDING

Please contact the office to book your rams in or for further details