

Tightening Up the Calving Pattern



A common frustration of beef suckler farmers is the calving period drifting from a compact block to an extended period. For most commercial beef farms, it is important to maintain a tight calving block whether it be spring or autumn. There are significant benefits to keeping the calving period to less than 12 weeks, firstly to ensure that all cows have a calf every 365 days. Other benefits include:

- Calves are a similar age – uniform cohort of calves to sell.
- Management practices easier to time: vaccinations/weaning/worming/castration.
- Easier to monitor when all cows calve down together: it is more difficult to watch one or two calving cows during silaging/harvesting, resulting in calf deaths.
- Better nutritional management of the cows, reducing the risk of oversize calves. This is a particular issue for summer calvers.
- Easier housing management as calves are all the same age.
- Lower disease rate due to less mixing of older and young calves.
- Less risk of accidental heifer pregnancies as the stock bull can be removed earlier and management practices can be put in place to keep bull and heifer calves separate near puberty.
- Better financial returns.

Achieving a tighter pattern is possible even if the pattern has slipped, by considering these options:

1. Body condition scoring cows

Incorrect body condition score at calving is the biggest factor in causing delays in getting pregnant again. Regular condition scoring to ensure cows maintain condition and calve down at a score 3 is vital. Cows that are over fat and too thin are more likely to have a difficult calving, which will also impede their fertility.

2. Check the bull(s)

Do not assume that because the bull worked last year, he is fine this year – injuries and infections may have been missed, which can result in poor fertility and a lot of expensive empty cows. Fertility test the bull(s) several weeks in advance of the bulling period to check that the bull is fit, fertile and ready to work. Once the bull goes in with the cows, monitor that he can physically serve cows. Back and leg injuries in bulls are a common reason why bulls won't jump and serve correctly.

3. Scan cows after 6-8 weeks of the bulls going in

This identifies cows which will calve early in the block and confirms that the bull is working correctly. Scan all cows 6 weeks after the bulls are removed completely to confirm pregnancy.

4. Remove the bull(s) after 12 weeks

The best way to stop the calving pattern extending is to get the bulls out after 12 weeks (or however long you wish your calving pattern to be).

5. Calve heifers earlier than the main cow block

Heifers can take slightly longer to get back in calf, so if they calve down earlier than the main herd, they should fall into the main block for their second calving.

6. Cull out 5-10% of cows that calf outside the main block annually

Cull trade on cattle is good at the time of this article being written. Gradually removing those that don't calve in the block will steadily bring the rest into the block. Avoid allowing cows to slip into a later block as this is costly and generally results in them becoming overfat which will affect their fertility.

7. Synchronise cows that are losing time

If you wish to retain some cows that are calving later in the block and at risk of losing time, then using hormone synchronization may help them to start cycling more quickly.

8. Use bulls with a shorter gestation period

If AI is used, then consider selecting bulls with a shorter gestation period to help keep the block tight.

Is your flock free from the ticking time bomb of enzootic abortion?

**FOR FLOCK'S SAKE
GET TESTED!**

The bacteria, *Chlamydophila abortus* causes enzootic abortion of ewes (or EAE) and is the most frequently diagnosed cause of abortion in the UK costing the British sheep industry £15-20M per year.

The ticking time bomb of EAE

If an infected ewe is brought into the flock, it is likely to abort in that lambing season and pass the infection to a larger number of ewes. The bacteria then remain latent within these newly infected ewes until the next lambing season, when they will abort and spread the disease further, and so it goes on each year.

Finding the cause of ANY abortion is vital to prevent the spread of infection. Ceva Animal Health has developed **Assure Ewe, a subsidised EAE blood testing programme which allows you to diagnose potential cases of enzootic abortion in your flock.**

How does Assure Ewe work?

If an abortion should occur at any time during lambing, please speak to your vet immediately and they will advise on the most appropriate means of diagnosis. It is recommended to test for EAE if you have experienced abortions:

- in 2% or more of the total flock or
- if 2 or more ewes have aborted over a 2 to 3 day period.

We can either take samples from an aborted foetus and placenta, or if this fails or samples are not taken, we can blood sample aborted ewes for blood testing for both EAE and Toxoplasma (the Toxoplasma tested is subsidised by MSD - makers of Toxovax).

Vaccinate with Cevac® Chlamydia before an abortion storm happens!

Cevac® Chlamydia is the U.K.'s number 1 vaccine to control EAE which provides protection against EAE in non-infected ewes and ewe lambs, will reduce the level of abortion in ewes already incubating infection and may help reduce bacterial shedding.



Subsidised Fluke Testing in Ewes

We are currently able to offer some faeces testing for liver fluke in sheep, where the lab fees will be covered. This will be targeted at farms which have a history of liver fluke or which treat annually for liver fluke. There will still be a charge for postage and reporting of the results.

If you are interested in this scheme, please call and speak to one of the vets so we can decide if you are eligible and explain how to submit the samples.

* STAFF NEWS *

We are sorry to report that Jose will be leaving us at the end of March but pleased that he will be taking up an amazing opportunity to research mosquitoes in Spain.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Lambing Course
Tuesday, 7th March from 2pm to 5pm
Monmouthshire Livestock Market

Mastering Medicines
Wednesday, 15th March at 2pm
The Bryn Village Hall

Please contact the office or
visit our website for further details

! JOKE TIME !

Farmer Giles is so interested in conserving energy, he built a pig-powered car. He has to get rid of it, though... every time he turns a corner, the tyres squeal!

SPOTINOR FOR LICE

As we are mid housing season now, some of your cattle may be showing signs of lice. As the majority of animals will have been treated at housing, likely with a group 3-ML product, it would be unnecessary to give a repeat dose of these products to treat for lice, when there has been no further exposure to worms.

Spotinor®

DON'T WAIT UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE
Stay on top of fly populations on farm to protect livestock productivity and welfare.

Easy Dosing:
Cattle = 10ml
Sheep = 5ml
Lambs = 2.5ml
(under 10kg weight or 1 month of age)

Norbrook®