

Could you improve your herd's performance by improving your water provision?

Water is, arguably, the cow's most important nutrient, but its provision is often overlooked. Water is required for optimal rumen fermentation and constitutes at least 87% of milk. A cow giving 30 litres of milk a day, on a silage-based mixed ration when the temperature is 20°C, will drink more than 100 litres per day - that's three litres of water for every litre of milk. Easy access to good quality fresh water is therefore important to optimise production.

Access Look at what your cows are telling you, is there ever an empty trough, or animal waiting to drink? It is important that heifers and submissive cows do not have to wait or get pushed away from the trough. Cows with restricted water access (twice a day vs. ad lib) repeatedly show a decrease in yield of 2.5% and 1.7% drop in butterfat.

Time and space For optimum health and production in a 24-hour period a cow should spend 3-5 hours eating, 30 minutes drinking, 12-14 hours lying and 2-3 hours socialising. The less time cows spend queuing or trekking to a water trough the better. AHDB recommends that 10cm water-trough space is required per cow to allow 10% of cows to drink at any one time. Ideally the trough should be 850mm from the floor and a 3.6m passageway behind the trough to allow two cows to pass behind those drinking.

Filling speed The speed of troughs filling up is also incredibly important, so that at times of peak demand (eg. after milking) they do not run low. A minimum flow rate of 10 litres per minute is recommended, but the actual requirement will depend on the size of the trough. Trough fill may be improved with wider pipes, pumps, or a reserve tank to use in times of high demand.

Access for all Good water supply to dry cows can really help to improve their dry matter intakes, particularly where the ration contains a lot of straw. This will improve their dry matter intakes post calving, reducing negative energy balance and all the related health issues. Lastly, remember some of your thirstiest and most vulnerable cows; those that are calving or are just post-calving. A cow may not get up to drink for a while after calving, so put a large bucket of warm water next to the calf soon after calving and she is likely to indulge.

Quality and Palatability Would you drink the cow's water? Cows have a very sensitive nose and will drink more water if it is palatable to them. Unfortunately, there is no way around this except cleaning troughs weekly. Tipping troughs or a large bung will make this task much easier.

Bacteria levels If you are not using mains water, then consider your water treatment. If you have a header tank, bacteria could proliferate before water even reaches the drinking troughs. Natural water sources are often preferred by cows, but avoid cattle drinking from streams that have passed through another livestock farm as this risks transmission of diseases such as Johne's or TB.

Minerals and Acidity Consider the mineral content of the water; high Iron and Manganese levels reduce palatability and increase oxidative stress on the cows. This weakens their immune function. Water that is too acidic could potentially contribute to subacute ruminal acidosis.



TB Rule Changes in Wales

There are significant changes with regards to TB testing rules and restrictions which come into place on **Monday 17th January 2022**. APHA should have notified you and we have sent you an email outlining changes.

If you wish to discuss these changes further please contact us at the office.

METABOLIC PROFILES IN SUCKLER COWS

Metabolic profiling is a useful management tool to 'ask the cows' what they think of their diet, to assess nutritional and health status of the herd. It involves analysing blood samples to investigate various parameters to provide information on protein, energy and mineral status of the cows. This can give an indication of both the short-term and longer-term nutritional status of the herd. It is often used as a management tool in the dairy herd to help fine-tune nutrition over the transition period to help reduce the risk of metabolic diseases and suboptimal fertility and has been used for many years in pregnant sheep prior to the start of lambing. However, it is less commonly used in beef herds and is useful to assess energy status and protein nutrition, as well as testing for key mineral elements.

Suckler cows are often fed on poor quality silage or straw and these can be lacking in protein, leading to poor rumen function and reduced colostrum and milk yield post-calving. Low magnesium is commonly diagnosed in suckler cows over the calving period, increasing the risk of slow calvings and hypomagnesaemia (staggers) during lactation. A minimum of six cows per group should be blood sampled, and these animals should be representative of the herd. It is important that cows have had at least two weeks to adapt to any ration changes before blood sampling in order for the results to reflect the new ration.

The key time to blood test is 1 month before calving to help optimise nutrition and health of both the cow and calf at calving, as well as subsequent cow fertility. Sampling again two to three weeks after calving can also be useful to check on post-calving nutritional status.

Farming Connect Funding could be used to help cover the cost of sampling and lab fees.

Watery Mouth Control – Spectam Unavailable

*There is an issue with the supply of **Spectam Scour Halt** this year. This is the only oral antibiotic licenced for the prevention of watery mouth in neonatal lambs, so planning should start now for any clients who may be expecting to use this product at lambing time. Over the last few years, we have had many clients who have managed to significantly reduce their use of antibiotics at lambing time, by focussing on good ewe nutrition, correct body condition score, a high standard of lambing shed hygiene and adequate and timely colostrum intake. Making use of scanning results, reviewing the ration and carrying out pre-lambing metabolic testing (+/- trace element assessment) will be particularly important this year.*

*Simply switching to another antibiotic is not the answer as illustrated by the following results from SRUC Veterinary Services who reviewed the antibiotic sensitivity results for 295 isolates of *E. coli* from lambs less than 4 weeks of age.*

- 52.5% of isolates were resistant to oxytetracycline (Alamycin LA/Engemycin)
- **41.2% were resistant to ampicillin** (similar to Betamox LA/Trymox LA)
- 29.8% were resistant to spectinomycin.
- **25% of isolates were resistant to four or more antibiotics.**

These results show that prevention is very important and if you do get cases of Watery Mouth samples should be taken to find out which antibiotic will work. There are some drugs which can be used preventatively, but you will need veterinary advice on these.

If you want any advice on how to prevent Watery Mouth or if you want to book Metabolic Profiles for your sheep, please call the office. Farming Connect Funding could be used for this work on eligible farms.



NADIS Parasite Forecasts

We are offering a new free service to our clients to keep you up-to-date with the latest information. These forecasts take into account local weather patterns and disease reports to forecast likely parasite issues. If any of you would like to sign up for free email/ text alerts to the NADIS parasite forecasts, please contact the surgery to register and make sure that your contact details are up to date.

Ordering Medicines

To ensure that we can supply you with the medicines that you need and to reduce waiting times on the forecourt, **please can you ring in advance** for your medicine orders, especially as we approach the busiest time of year.