

Rearing Replacement Heifers

Do you monitor growth rates in your calves to ensure they are on track to be served at 13.5 months of age? Holstein Friesian type calves should be about 120kg body weight at 120 days of age if they are gaining 0.8kg per day. Heifers should be between 375 & 400kg when they are about to be bred, both in suckler or dairy enterprises. Research suggests that the most efficient age to calve heifers is 23-24 months therefore ideally they need to be big enough to be served from 13.5 months of age. Monitor heifer weight a few months in advance of the planned breeding date to ensure they are on track. If they aren't on track, then it is worth discussing with your vet, why not?

Why are my calves not thriving?

It is not uncommon on a particular farm for some batches of calves to do better than others. It is worth recording performance of calves born by month of the year. On some farms, calves born during a particular period of time regularly do badly. Is this because the shed is over-crowded or they don't get the proper attention because you are busy at other things?

To optimise calf health consider the following

Batch rearing- Why do pig and poultry farmers see this as a pre-requisite for success?

Colostrum- Quality- Get a colostrometer. If quality is poor, then either feed more or else use colostrum from another cow within the herd bearing in mind Johnes disease risk. Quantity- 10% of body weight (3- 4 litres in first 6 hours of life).

Cleanliness of environment from calving pen through to rearing shed. In addition bucket & automatic milk machine hygiene is important. Stock pile plenty of straw!

Consumption of feed- Are the calves getting enough milk - Is the milk replacer being mixed at the correct rate whether fed by automatic machine or manually? Are they eating a kilo of concentrate at weaning?

Vaccination- for calf scour or pneumonia. Remember vaccination boosts immunity and reduces the levels of disease released into the environment. Often as the calving season progresses the problems get worse, so start vaccination programs before the problem is evident this year for a better chance of success.

Disease- Does every calf scour? What % of calves are treated for pneumonia and how many are successfully treated the first time? (Prompt treatment of pneumonia improves long term treatment success rate). Taking samples from several scouring calves prior to treatment will aid in making a diagnosis so that control measures can be put in place- consider vaccinating dry cows to boost colostral immunity to E. coli, rotavirus and coronavirus. Calves which had pneumonia last winter that are now over 6 months of age can be blood sampled to see whether they have been exposed to viral pneumonia or *Mycoplasma bovis*. If necessary a vaccination program should be put in place before next winter, however there are no commercially available vaccines for *Mycoplasma* in cattle.

Environment- Is the shed damp, draughty or overcrowded at times? How many calves will be born each month and have you room for them all? Plan ahead.



What About Performance at Grass?

Ironically on some farms performance of the young stock is better in the shed than in the field perhaps because the consistency and quality of the diet is better in the shed plus internal parasites can be a problem. Coccidiosis can affect calves both in the shed and in the field. Drenches are available or else a coccidiostat can be included in the concentrate under veterinary prescription. Worms and fluke can affect animals at pasture particularly in a wet year. If animals are scouring and not thriving, dung samples can be useful to find out the reason why. In particular ensure first season grazing animals are adequately wormed. Make sure animals are treated based on their **actual** body weight. Don't try to apply Pour-On while animals are feeding at a trough- it won't work!

On many farms fluke will be an issue as the grazing season progresses so consider a mid season fluke dose as well as the more routine housing dose. Remember not all products treat immature liver fluke and if rumen fluke has been an issue in the past discuss the best options with the practice.



REMINDER Store all Vaccines Between 2⁰ C & 8⁰ C Other medicines store below 25⁰ C

TELEVISION

Downe Vets are once again starring in a national TV programme - Mountain Vets. If you want to showcase your farm, get in touch and we will aim to include you in the next series.

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Quarantine Treatment

Recommendations for Sheep

Purchased sheep may bring unwanted parasites onto farms. Anthelmintic resistant worms are probably more common than we imagine. In light of this a group of experts have suggested the SCOPS protocol which can now be summarised as follows:

Treat all new arrivals with one of the new families of wormers, Zolvix or Startect drench and Ivermectin/ Doramectin/Moxidectin injection to cover scab.

Keep treated sheep off pasture for 24-48 hours while all worm eggs they are carrying are passed in the dung. Foot bath sheep and check all feet, remember if using Zinc Sulphate they must stand in it for at least 20 minutes. Spray all non-dipped sheep to protect against blow fly, check that all rams in particular have been vaccinated against pasteurella.

Castration & Dehorning

We are approaching the autumn calving season. It is well to remember that the best time to castrate and de-horn cattle is under 7 days of age. Use rubber bands for castration and Calfstick for disbudding. Carrying out these procedures in older animals causes increased stress, decreased weight gain and increased risk of injury to both animal and human.