

Farm First Newsletter September 2015

The benefits of data collection and analysis in suckler herds The recording and analysis of data on beef suckler herd performance may take some time, but it does enable the root causes of any production issues to be more easily identified and investigated. It can prove a very worthwhile investment of time and effort says Rob Smith of Farm First Vets.

For a beef suckler herd, the most important overall performance indicator is the number of calves weaned compared to the number of cows served. This effectively summarises most of the other data, and in an ideal world should be over 95%. A figure close to this would suggest a well-run herd, which will probably require very few changes in its management. But anything less and we need to delve deeper..... by having the data, it is easy to see what the problems are, and investigate accordingly.

So record the numbers of cows/heifers that are mated, and then how many prove to be barren or have abortions. Also record the number of calvings and any stillbirths. A shortfall in overall herd performance may, for example, prove to be due to a high number of apparently barren cows in a group, which in turn may indicate a problem with bull fertility. As well as recording the number of calvings, also make a note of those that require assistance or a Caesarean. A high incidence of stillbirths and Caesareans/assisted calvings would imply an issue with oversized calves and possible inappropriate bull selection.

When it comes to calf health, record the number of calves born alive, and if and when any of them die. Record the number of cases of calf scour or pneumonia that occur, at what age it happens and whether treatment was required. If deaths occur at less than a month old then this may suggest a colostrum issue, or infections/poor hygiene if calving inside; whereas deaths of older calves suggest other issues.

Another benefit that comes from collecting data on a farm is the potential to benchmark your own herd's performance by comparing it with the data from other farms (ideally of a similar size and make-up). However, benchmarking only works if you, the farmer, want to do it, and have the right reasons for doing so. It is an opportunity to pick out potential weaknesses or management issues that may be holding your business back. Benchmarking can also be used to pick up issues that may not directly affect the calves born/cows mated figure, but do impact on herd management and longer term performance and profitability.

e.g. Ideally, at least 65% of cows should be calving in the first three weeks of a spring or autumn calving block, so as to maximise calf weight at weaning and ensure cows are cycling again in plenty of time for the bulls going back out. So calculate the start of the calving block and divide it into three-week periods. Record how many cows/heifers calve down in each time period to determine your calving spread. By looking at this data, it is possible to identify if the calving spread is too wide, and then to consider what actions are required to tighten it.

The reasons why adult cattle leave the herd can also be useful, so record the number of cattle that die or are culled between weaning and 2 years of age, adult cattle that die of natural causes and those that are culled (and reasons). Other aspects of herd health that could be recorded include incidences of lameness, milk fever, mastitis and respiratory disease.

In summary, data analysis is not completely diagnostic of specific problems, but it is a guide to pinpoint the places for investigation. It can be a very valuable tool in the improvement of the overall profitability of a beef suckler herd. Please contact us on 01873 840167 if you are interested in taking this further with your herd.

Keep Worm Resistance Off Your Farm. There is a need to act now by integrating the new classes of wormers Zolvix and Startect into worming programs to fight wormer resistance and help protect traditional classes of drench. Resistance to gastro-intestinal worms has been recognised for some time, with many farms affected by worm populations that are resistant to traditional drenches – the white (benzimidazoles or 1-BZ), yellow (levamisoles or 2-LM) and clear (macrocyclic lactones or 3-ML) wormers. Indeed, recent studies have shown that worms resistant to the 3-ML group, including moxidectin and ivermectin based products are on the increase. Resistance stops the drench working effectively, so resistant worms are left behind.

Zolvix or Startect should be used as a quarantine doses to clean out all incoming stock by removing the hidden burden of resistant worms. All incoming stock including replacements, stock returning from “tack” or off-farm grazing, and new rams should be treated. Incoming stock can look perfectly healthy but carry the seed stock of future resistant worm populations, or even new worm species such as *Haemonchus contortus* which is spreading north and becoming more common.

We currently have some money off vouchers for farmers who want to use Zolvix as a quarantine dose. There is £5 off a 500ml Pack, £10 off a 1 litre pack and £30 off a 2.5 litre pack. Please contact the office if you want to take advantage of any of these vouchers.

New BVD Vaccine BVD vaccination rates in the UK vary between around 40 to 80% and vaccination has traditionally been through use of inactivated vaccines against BVDV 1. These vaccines provided a level of immunity that has allowed farmers to get on top of BVD in many herds. However, BVD control has moved on.

Bovela® is a revolutionary BVD vaccine that was developed in partnership with leading research institutes in the UK and Germany. It harnesses the immunity produced in response to natural infection, without the side effects of natural infection.

The strong immune response to vaccination with Bovela means that only one injection is needed as a primary course, with a booster 12 months later. Bovela is licensed for active immunisation of cattle against BVDV 1 and BVDV 2, to prevent the birth of persistently infected calves caused by transplacental infection. It can also be used from 3 months of age, to protect calves from the effects of the disease). The vaccine has already been tried and tested in safety and efficacy studies including many thousands of animals. With the increased ease of use and protection provided, we expect that this vaccine will provide advanced BVD control in the UK.

If you would like more information or prices for this new vaccine, please ring us at the office.

Charity Challenge Update

Many thanks to those of you who have donated to our good causes, Send a Cow, Beat and St, David's Hospice. We have now successfully completed 2 activities – canoeing and the horse ride. Special mention should go to Tracy who endured the whole ride on a jogging horse. She has not ridden in recent years, so came into the office the next morning walking like a cross between John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. Rob was very relieved we all stayed on and has agreed to run a half marathon to make up for the miles he didn't do on the horse. We will also be cycling from Brecon to Abergavenny next Wednesday. If you haven't donated yet, and want to do so, just give us a ring and we will sort it, or come and see us at Usk show and put some money in box.



Usk Show As usual, we will have our stand at Usk show and you are welcome to join us for tea, cake and a sit down. Let's hope the sun shines.