

Winter has arrived signalling the end of Autumn calving, tups are in and pneumonia watch begins. Unfortunately the wet, cold days haven't done the calves any good and we have seen some outbreaks occurring, so be aware. Getting our ATT's on the way has been an interesting exercise but we are fast approaching the day we can send Leanne out on her own. Please read the introduction to both Leanne and Catherine below, and give them a nice welcome when they come on your farm.

Have you noticed the available Farming Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF) government grants? The FETF is designed to support businesses by investing in equipment which improves productivity or supports sustainability. We know of several people that have successfully made use of this, so make sure you do not miss out on any upgrades to your livestock handling and weighing equipment.

By the time you read this Christmas has been celebrated and hopefully has not been ruined by the dreaded Covid. That leaves me to wish you all a very happy, prosperous 2022!

LEANNE MILLS

We would like to introduce our first Approved TB tester (ATT), Leanne Mills. Leanne joined us in November and will be training under supervision of our vets over the next few months until fully qualifying as an ATT. Leanne worked locally as a hunt groom and calf rearer prior to joining our team. Whilst Leanne is already a recognisable face to some of our clients, she is looking forward to meeting everybody else.



CATHERINE O'DELL

And our second ATT has joined us too from the first of December, Catherine O'Dell. Catherine has been working with JSR, a big pig company in Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire, where she worked on the breeding units and the boar stud. No doubt we will see Catherine appear alongside Nick on the breeding side of Cliffe vets.

6 years ago she came down to beautiful Sussex where she worked with sheep, cattle and chickens on a small organic farm.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR BLOCK CALVING FERTILITY TARGETS?

Many dairies in the southeast are Autumn block calvers meaning that now is the time to be getting our herds back in-calf. The fertility targets for block calving herds can be quite confusing. Here, I have outlined why these figures are used and what typically underpins them.

21-day submission rate (%) – Block calving herds aim to calve the bulk of their cows in a 12-week period; there is therefore a need for a tight service period. A cow's oestrus cycle is 21-days, therefore we would like every cow to have had at least one service in these first 21 days of the mating period. Some cows have slightly longer cycles, so a submission rate between 89-94% is a good target. The number of cows receiving a service in the first 21-days of mating, as a percentage of the number of cows you plan to serve that mating period is your 21-day submission rate. Often farmers get hung-up on eligibility of those cows (i.e. are they over 35 days calved at the start of mating?) however, unfortunately for some, eligibility should not be a factor. The tightness of the calving block reflects in the submission rate, so late calvers which haven't been served as they're too freshly calved, should still be added to the total cows. Voluntary culls (which you never intend to serve) or Johnes positive animals, which you only plan to serve to beef and thus intentionally do not serve at the start of the block, should be taken out of this figure. A low submission rate may reflect lots of non-bulling cows, lots of late calvers or poor heat detection.

Conception rate (%) – I typically only consider the 3-week and 6-week conception rate, reflecting the first and second services of most cows. This gives a good indication of the overall fertility. Cows which are on their 4th and 5th service are likely to falsely drag down your conception rates as the odds are often against these 'problematic' cows. Therefore, the number of services in the first 3-weeks as a percentage of the number of pregnancies in the first 3-weeks, is your 3-week conception rate (same rules applies for the 6-week conception rate). Target for most herds is between 50-60%. Causes of poor conception rates may include energy status, stress, poorly timed AI or AI technique.

Six-week in calf rate (6WICR) (%) – This is a very useful figure which ultimately reflects the number of cows you have served and the number of conceptions you have achieved during the busiest mating period. In an all-year round system this is similar to the pregnancy rate. The 6WICR will be low if we either haven't served enough cows (submission rate) or cows are being served but not conceiving (conception rate). A 6WICR of 70% or over is very acceptable for an autumn block system, although some herds can reach over 80%.

Every farm is individual, and you should all be striving to achieve bespoke targets outlined by yourselves and your vets, however ensuring we all have a clear understanding of the terminology is a good starting point.



JOHNE'S AND THE SUCKLER HERD—IS IT A PROBLEM?

The cattle are housed, youngstock weaned and suckler herds are preparing for the dawn of a new calving season. A common call out at this time is to the skinny suckler cow. Often these animals have been losing condition for a while and haven't responded to a fluke and worming dose at housing which prompts vet intervention

Johne's is an economically important disease of both dairy and beef cattle. Unfortunately, the focus has been heavily biased to the dairy sector, yet the disease has important economic implications for many suckler herds. A report published by ADAS and AHDB in 2012 estimated the cost to a suckler herd with ten percent of animals infected to be £4500 per year. Losses included reduced number of weaned calves per year, lighter calves at weaning (calves born to Johne's positive dams can be 9-15% lighter at weaning compared to calves born to Johne's negative dams) and higher replacement rates.

The true prevalence of Johne's disease in beef cattle is unknown. However a study of farms in the South West in 2006 estimated the prevalence of infected beef herds to be 78.9%. The most common clinical signs are condition loss, scour and submandibular oedema (bottle jaw) with knock on effects such as reduced milk yield, reduced conception rates and increased lameness.

Johne's is further complicated by testing inadequacies. The incubation period of Johne's disease is long and most animals show signs between the ages of 2 and 6 years. Unfortunately test accuracy can be as low as 30% for animals which are not yet showing symptoms therefore testing can miss infected animals giving a false negative result. Despite this, the test is cheap and to test a 100-cow herd the cost would be approximately £800 (including vet time). This means that if one positive cow is identified her cull value will cover the cost of testing and vet time whilst preventing infection spreading to the subsequent calf crop.

Control of Johne's involves avoiding calf contact with contaminated faeces. Positive animals should be calved separately and should not come into contact with susceptible "clean" calves at any point. This often means running a Johne's group with several animals calving, grazing, being weaned and then being culled together and their calves should not be retained for breeding. The manure produced from these cows in the calving yard should only be spread on arable land as Johne's can remain infectious for 12 months.

Effective control of Johne's is possible, however eradication is unlikely. Improving farm management practices can reduce infection prevalence drastically within five to seven years. Our external laboratory has introduced a Johne's monitoring scheme which aims to provide commercial suckler herds access to reduced testing costs, quick turnaround times and telephone advice all without the need for compliance with CHACS rules.

Johne's is emerging as a financially important disease of beef suckler herds and its control is cost beneficial to any herd where active infection has been confirmed- please speak to one of our vets if you have any queries about the disease or if you have any cattle which are suspected clinical cases, we are always happy to help!



BRITISH MASTITIS CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 2021

attended by Bill Pepper

The twin focus of this event was first on diagnostic testing for mastitis, and then the concept of "treatment worthiness" for mastitis cases.

Mastitis diagnosis

Overnight on farm culture of milk samples to identify the bacteria involved is now being used on some farms to influence the decision whether to use antibiotics or only anti-inflammatories. However the accuracy of interpretation is imperfect and the delay in treatment may actually lead to **more** antibiotics being required to effect a cure, especially if the cause is strep uberis or staph aureus.

A novel lateral flow test is soon to be launched with improved accuracy and a quicker result.

To treat or not to treat a mastitis case in lactation?

A novel app is being created using data from 52 UK dairy herds that will calculate the probability of a cure for a case of clinical mastitis in milk recorded herds, based on the individual cow's mastitis history, age, stage in lactation etc, as well as the herd history of mastitis. Certain repeat cases have a less than 10% probability of successful treatment. It could be argued that, in the interests of use of antibiotics, these cases are not really worth treating with antibiotics and other options should be considered such as drying off the affected quarter, early drying off, culling.

We will keep you informed of further exciting developments! Bill



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