# ARDENE HOUSE
VET PRACTICE LTD

Farm Newsletter
February 2020

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## *Lambing Course 2020*

**We would like to thank everyone who joined us for the lambing course on 14th February 2020 - It was a success filled with a lot of discussion, learning, and (most importantly) a good time!**

**Our next sheep smallholders course will be held in August 2020 - stay tuned for more information!**

## In this issue:



Check out news on our website and let us know what you think.
**www.ardenehouse.co.uk**
If you would like to receive our quarterly newsletters by email please send us a message via the contacts page on our website.

**24 Hour Emergency Service 01224 740700**

# Heifer Pelvic Measurements

Dystocia, or difficult calving, is a significant concern for all cows, but especially for first-calf heifers. There are many factors that can increase the risk of a difficult calving, such as gestation length, sex of the calf, body condition of the cow at calving, and abnormal position of the calf. Ultimately, the main cause of dystocia is that the calf is too large to easily pass through the cow's birth canal. One way to minimize the risk of a heifer having a calf too large for her is to take measurements of the heifer's birth canal before breeding.

## Advantages to pelvic measurements

One of the main advantages to obtaining pelvic measurements is to detect before breeding if a heifer has an abnormal birth canal - either small for her size, or otherwise abnormally shaped.
If these measurements are obtained at 12-13 months of age, a heifer with a small or abnormally shaped pelvis can be identified before the heifer is in calf, when it is optimal to decide whether to keep the heifer for breeding or fattening.

Pelvic measurements are necessary to accurately assess the size of the heifer's pelvic area. Simply selecting heifers with a larger body size does not guarantee that the heifers have a larger birth canal: Although heifer size is generally positively correlated with pelvic size, this is not always the case. Even the outer dimensions of the pelvis, such as width and length of the rump, are not always accurate indicators of the heifer's pelvic area. Also, even if the size of the heifer does correlate with the size of the birth canal, selecting heifers by body weight alone is unlikely to be entirely effective - While larger heifers are more likely to have a larger pelvic area, they are also more likely to have heavier calves.

University of Nebraska researchers have also calculated how to use the pelvic area to estimate the size of calf that a heifer should be able to have without difficulty. For example, a 12-13 month old heifer weighing 600 pounds (272kg) with a pelvic area of 160cm$^2$ is expected at 2-years-old to be able to calve a 76 pound (34.5kg) calf without assistance. It should be emphasized that this estimate is not what size the calf will be, but only what size calf a heifer would likely be able to give birth to without difficulty. This estimate can assist in making other management decisions, such as bull selection, to ensure the calf is likely to be within this estimated value.

## How pelvic measurements are obtained

Measurements are obtained by using a pelvimeter, for example a Rice pelvimeter (Fig 1) from within the rectum. The pelvimeter is passed gently into the rectum in a cupped gloved hand. The height is the distance from the midpoint of the pubic symphysis to the mid-sacrum. The width is the distance between the shafts of the ilia, perpendicular to where the height was measured (Fig 2). The pelvic area is calculated by multiplying the height by the width to obtain an area in cm$^2$.

Fig 1: Rice pelvimeter

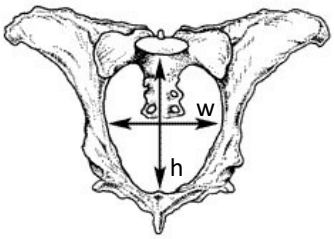


Fig 2: Pelvic area is calculated by multiplying the height (h) by the width (w) of internal pelvic canal.

## Summary

Pelvic measurements can be an important part of minimizing the risk of dystocia in heifers when they are combined with other management factors such as selecting bulls for calving ease (low birth weight EPD), ensuring the heifers meet pre-breeding target weights, and ensuring the heifers are an appropriate body condition at calving.

If you would like to discuss obtaining pelvic measurements in your heifers, or any other aspect of heifer management, please contact the Ardene House farm office at 01224 740700.

# News Updates

## New guidelines for Magnesium supplementation pre-calving

New data shows that magnesium from rock sources are not as readily absorbed as previously thought. Therefore, current advice from the SRUC is to increase the level of magnesium being given to suckler cows before calving:

> 'Magnesium oxide is the most common form used in mineral supplements in the UK and Karen Stewart, a livestock nutritionist at SAC Consulting, said given the recent information, depending on the diet, it would be advisable to increase magnesium in suckler cow pre-calving minerals.
>
> "The current guidelines is 10 per cent magnesium in a pre-calving mineral for normal silage rations and I think the revised absorption coefficients would justify an increase to 15 per cent magnesium to take account of the reduced absorption," she said.'

Magnesium is essential for mobilizing calcium in order to help with muscle contractions. Therefore, low magnesium is associated with decreased muscle contraction which results in a slower calving.

If there is additional risk for staggers on the farm, or if the silage has higher than normal potassium levels due to slurry applications, then even further magnesium supplementation may be required. Full silage analysis including minerals is essential for determining how much additional minerals should be supplemented.

The full statement by SRUC can be found online at https://www.sruc.ac.uk/news/article/2596/magnesium_boost_could_reduce_slow_calving_risk .

If you are concerned about the magnesium levels in your cattle, please contact us to discuss how we can work with you to assess magnesium levels in your herd.

# Preparing for lambing: Lambing boxes


All items are available individually. We also have pre-made lambing boxes available with all the essentials packed in a carrying caddy.

## Standard box

- Lambing ropes: Leg ropes + head snare
- Lube
- Arm-length gloves
- Iodine with dipping pot
- Bottle with teat
- Feeding tube with syringe
- Castration kit: elastrator rings + pliers
- Thermometer

## Refill box

- Lambing ropes: Leg ropes
- Lube
- Arm-length gloves
- Iodine with dipping pot
- Bottle with teat
- Feeding tube with syringe
- Castration kit: elastrator rings

Also available:

**-Ceto-phyton:** energy supplement for ewes

**-Veterinary Lamb Drench:** nutritional supplement for lambs



If you have any questions or would like to place an order, contact the Ardene House farm office at 01224 740 700