



Avian Influenza Update

The Avian Influenza Prevention Zone that came into effect at the end of November is still in place. This makes it a legal requirement to keep all birds housed and to take steps to ensure you have good biosecurity around your birds housing.

If you suspect Avian Influenza in your birds please phone APHA on 03000 600708. If you would like further advice about the housing restrictions please call the Farm Office on 01224 740700.

Change to the Practice Synchronisation Protocol

We have changed our practice synchronisation protocol to reflect the most up to date advice around beef cow synchronisation. Synchronisation of beef breeding cattle can be beneficial to allow fixed timed AI enabling the use of different genetics in certain groups of animals. It can also be used to tighten calving intervals of later calving cows.

The current protocol is

- Insertion of an intra vaginal progesterone device at day 0 with a GnRH injection
- Removal of the progesterone device and injection of Prostaglandin at day 7. This injection requires a veterinary visit
- Fixed timed AI at 60-66 hours or turn out to bull

There are many variations to artificial insemination and synchronization protocols, if this is something you think could benefit your farm please call the Farm Office (01224 740700) to discuss this with one of our Farm Vets.

Heifer Management

There are many reasons for a focus on beef herd efficacy. Historically UK farmers have very good history of improving terminal traits. However some other beef producing countries have made more headway in maternal traits such as fertility, milk, mature weight and many other traits. Studies have shown that fertility is 5 times more important than growth rate and 10 times more important than carcass quality for profit.

Calving heifers at 2 years old reduces heifer development costs and can increase production and longevity of these animals. It also acts to reduce carbon emissions by 3.8% which is an important consideration. There are 3 key drivers to allow heifers to calf at 2 years old which are genetics, selection and nutrition.

Genetics – there are some key maternal traits that are good to look for in suckler replacements that can be identified based on bull EBVs

- Calving ease of female offspring
- Age of first calving

- Scrotal circumference – there is a correlation of scrotal circumference to fertility of their offspring
- Mature size – currently the UK is seeing a gradual increase in cow weight but increased cow size leads to higher maintenance costs due to the requirement for increased feed quality and quantity.
- AHDB research has found the optimum cow size for the UK is 680kg
- A cow should wean >45% of her mature weight
- Milk

Selection

- Fertility – as discussed above fertility is really important for profitability. This also allows for a short breeding season, which should be less than 12 weeks
- Size – heifers should be 65% of their mature weight at 14 months old. This makes them more likely to have reached puberty and be cycling by the time they go to the bull. It helps to select for heifers from cows that calved at the start of the breeding season and so are the most fertile cows in the herd
- Temperament – flightier heifers reach puberty later and have reduced conception rates compared to quieter animals
- Feet and structure
- Dam performance – keeping good records to allow this is important. E.g. avoiding keeping replacements from cows that required assistance at calving, are calving later in the breeding season, failed to wean a calf, have large teats, weaned a light calf etc.
- Consider pelvic measuring as a way to identify heifers with a larger pelvic area to allow reduced dystocia. This should be done pre breeding. Nutrition and growth rates need to be optimised so that pelvic scores on their own are not relied on.

Nutrition – good nutritional management allows heifers to reach their target mature weight pre breeding and allow them to have shorter inter calving intervals.

To allow the target weight at breeding, heifers should grow 1 kg per day while with their mother and 0.7 kg per day from weaning to breeding. It is often after weaning when growth drops below the optimum, this growth rate can be achieved on good quality silage or may require some additional concentrate. Poor growth and nutrition at this time will affect puberty onset leading to reduced conception rate and increased pregnancy loss.

Due to their increased energy demand due to growth as well as lactation after calving, heifers tend to have a longer resumption of ovulation compared to cows. This can be an average of 18 days extra. This means it is important that their body condition is optimal (BCS at calving should be 3) as body condition is the single most important factor linked to resumption of ovulation.

For further information on heifer management please speak to one of our Farm Vets or go to the AHDB website and find the following resources

[Managing Replacement Heifers for Better Returns](#)

[AHDB Maternal Matters Campaign](#)

If you would like to receive our newsletters by email, please send an email to
 farmandequine@ardenehouse.co.uk

You can find previous newsletters on our website www.ardenehouse.co.uk

01224 740700