



Suckler Herd Fertility Mark Crawshaw

Most spring calving herds will have joined their cows and bulls or will be doing so shortly. It is important to check how things are going by monitoring returns to oestrus in the cows. We would expect a fully fertile, mature bull joined with no more than 50 fertile cows to get at least 60% of the non-pregnant cows to conceive every 3 weeks. Therefore, after 6-weeks at least 80% of the cows should be pregnant. So, if you see more than 20% (1 in 5) of the cows returning after 6-weeks something could be wrong and by this time the calving pattern of the herd is significantly disrupted. More often than not it is the bull that has a problem, either he is not serving cows due to lameness or illness or his semen quality has deteriorated. Bulls can become subfertile or infertile if there is an insult to the testes such as illness, infection, heat stress or injury. This can be permanent or temporary and can be investigated by a veterinary breeding soundness examination of the bull. Farmers often mitigate this risk by rotating bulls around different groups of cows. However, if one bull is infertile then it can become difficult to identify which one it is. An increasing number of farmers are carrying out bull breeding soundness examinations around a month before joining the bulls with the cows to overcome this problem, so only fully fertile bulls are used and the risk of the calving pattern being disrupted is minimised. On the other hand the fertility of the group may be a cow problem associated with poor body condition, an extended previous calving period, a high incidence of calving problems in the previous calving period, an ageing cow herd where culling has not been appropriate or underfed first calvers. There is also the possibility of the infectious venereal disease *Campylobacter fetus* which if introduced to the herd for the first time with an infected cow or bull will cause severe fertility problems then ongoing poor fertility.

Once the cows are pregnant then they need to be monitored for abortion. There is a natural abortion rate of around 2% and anything higher than this could be a sign of an infectious disease which could be a threat to the herd and therefore should be investigated. The best method is laboratory testing of the fetus and afterbirth. We can collect the samples and submit them for testing, alternatively the farmer can take the foetus and afterbirth, if possible, to the SRUC labs in either Glasgow or Dumfries. There is an argument for testing any suitable aborted foetus found since in beef cows the foetus of an aborted cow is often not found or is unsuitable for examination due to predation or trampling etc.

Bull MOTs Natasha McCappin

A fit bull will; reduce your calving interval, help tighten your calving spread, require less input, and ultimately result in better financial returns. It is estimated that the annual cost of keeping a bull is ~£1600. This figure considers purchase price, depreciation and fixed, feed, and grazing costs.

Keeping an unfit bull is expensive.

~20% of bulls are sub fertile on examination and it is highly recommended to assess your bull prior to turn out.



It is a valuable practice to book in a pre-breeding soundness (PBS) evaluation in good time pre-mating alongside a general foot trim to avoid disappointment and set your bulls up for good performance this season.

At MBM Vet Group our PBS evaluation conforms with British cattle veterinary association guidelines and a certificate will be produced for sales and/or personal records. During a PBS evaluation the vet will check the bulls; general health, condition, locomotion, and internal and external genitalia before collecting a sample of semen via an electro – ejaculator and analysed for volume, density, motility, and morphology.

Testicle size and semen quality are obvious indicators of fertility; however sometimes bulls will not be serving cows due to a lameness issue. Our WOPA crush is a safe and effective way to handle bulls, allowing us to semen test and check your bulls feet on the same visit to the crush.

A bull MOT (physical and semen evaluation, feet trim and health advice) costs:

- 1st Bull: £143.94 ex VAT
- 2nd Bull +: £98.51 ex VAT

Please get in touch if you would like peace of mind before mating begins

Summer Mastitis Jennifer Hutchison

What is it?

As the name suggests, this mastitis is seen during the summer months, with the causal bacteria (mainly *T. pyogenes*) spread by the head fly which hatch from July onwards. Dry cows and in-calf heifers are mainly affected, but it can be seen in beef cows as well as dairy, and even bullocks and calves. Animals typically present with a swollen, painful udder and may appear lame. The animal often has a temperature (>39.2C), is dull and may abort. Stripping the affected quarter(s) yields thick smelly pus.

Cases tend to occur in the same fields year after year, with flies preferring calm, humid conditions like those near trees and ponds.

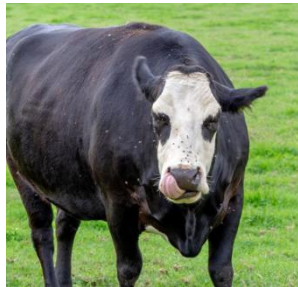
Treatment

Very rarely can the quarter be saved, but usually treatment will save the animal. Injectable antibiotics and anti-inflammatories should be administered, alongside regular quarter stripping (which should be done into a bucket to avoid a further infection source). Historic treatments sometimes involved teat removal for drainage, but it can result in bleeding, so is rarely advised.



Prevention

Given the poor outcome, prevention is key and centres on good fly control and environmental management.



- Fly prevention using a pour-on – a small amount can be applied around/onto the udder
- Reduce exposure by grazing susceptible animals away from high-risk fields
- External teat sealants are easy to apply and provide a barrier. Stockholm tar was traditionally used but is messy and requires re-application.
- Internal teat sealants and dry cow antibiotic therapy provide the most effective prevention, but is easier said than done in beef cows and heifers!
- Watch out for teat lesions which attract flies.

NEW On Farm Mastitis Detection: Vetoslides, an Aid to Antibiotic Reduction Michael Fallon

Mastitis diagnostic to help reduce the unnecessary use of antibiotics

To support the continued reduction of the unnecessary use of antibiotics we can now offer you VetoSlide; a new, inexpensive, culture for mild-moderate cases of mastitis. VetoSlide is an easy test that identifies which type of bacteria are present in clinical mastitis milk samples. This information then allows you to make informed and targeted treatment decisions on a case-by-case basis.



It is a straightforward process, only needing a VetoSlide test kit and an incubator. On finding a case of mastitis, a sterile milk sample is taken from the affected quarter then each side of the slide is swabbed as shown on the instructions and incubated for 24 hours. After 8-12 hours it can be examined to see if there is any growth on the green Gram-negative side of the plate. Even if there is evidence of bacteria, the slide is incubated for the full 24 hours to check for Gram-positive on the red side. Growth on both sides would indicate a mixed infection or a contaminated sample.

Whilst waiting for the result the cow should receive a zero-milk withdrawal anti-inflammatory, but no antibiotic treatment. A slide that has no growth or Gram-negative only growth would often indicate that there is no need to treat that animal with antibiotic. Whereas growth on the red Gram-positive side would be more suggestive of the animal needing antibiotic treatment. Please discuss your treatment protocols with us.

Using VetoSlide will result in a more focused use of antibiotics which in turn will reduce the amount of milk discarded and the time milk is kept out of the tank due to withdrawal periods. Speak to us to find out more about VetoSlide and how it can help you achieve more targeted antibiotic use for mastitis. We currently have one farm trialling the slides and one more incubator and set of slides for another farm to trial. Please get in touch if you are interested in getting involved.

MBM Veterinary Group

MAUCHLINE
(01290) 550452



KILMARNOCK
(01563) 522701



BEITH
(01505) 502126



WWW.MBMVETGROUP.CO.UK