

Data Collection and Analysis in Beef Suckler Herds

Emily Robinson
BVetMed MRCVS

Without recording data, it is impossible to monitor production or identify any problems.

The more information you can record, the better, but the following performance indicators for the beef suckler herd are particularly important:

- **Number of calves weaned per number of cows served**

This should ideally be at least 95%, showing minimal losses both during pregnancy and in the neonatal period and suggesting a well-run herd requiring few management changes. A lower figure would warrant investigation into where these losses are occurring, looking into figures such as 'number of calves born per number of cows served' and calf mortality (0-28 days and 28 days-weaning). High numbers of barren cows may suggest issues with bull fertility which would warrant further investigation.

- **Percentage of cows calving within the first 3 weeks of the calving block (and subsequent 3 week blocks)**

You should ideally be seeing 65% of cows calving within the first 3 weeks. This indicates good conception rates and, if a tight service period is used (ideally a maximum of 9 weeks/3 cycles), all cows should have calved within 12 weeks. A tight calving period results in an even batch of calves at weaning, and should lead to improved calf health and growth rates.

- **Number of assisted calvings**

This should be recorded as specifically as possible, ideally indicating the level of intervention required. High numbers of calvings requiring intervention may suggest oversized calves, which could reflect an inappropriate choice of bull, and high levels of stillbirths may suggest problems with, for example, iodine deficiency.

- **Calf mortality and calf health incidents**

When (if at all!) calves are dying this can give you an idea as to the underlying issues. For example, calves dying within 28 days of age may suggest issues with colostrum quality or quantity.



- **Calf weights**

Calves should be weighed as frequently as possible in order to detect subtle changes in growth rates which may be early indicators of disease, e.g. respiratory disease or worms. Without measuring calf weights you will have little idea how well they are doing.

All of this information can be analysed and used to compare your own farm year on year to ensure that productivity is not slipping. It can also be used to compare your own herd's performance against that of other farms of a similar size and make-up. This should not be viewed as a 'my herd is better than yours' exercise, but rather a way of picking up on potential weaknesses or management issues that may be holding back your profitability.

Ultimately, none of this information can be analysed if it is not recorded! The system does not have to be complicated - a simple spreadsheet can be emailed to your vet before your annual herd health plan review, allowing the vet to analyse your productivity over the past year, highlighting things that have worked well and suggesting areas for improvement.

If you are interested in learning more about data recording, or wish to join our 'Premium Beef Contract', please contact us at the practice for more information.



WELCOME TO farm 2015 news



NOVEMBER 2015

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Please note that telephone calls are recorded for quality and monitoring purposes.



Meet the Team: Susan Wilkinson



Susan is our Marketing Manager and has worked for Scarsdale for 4 1/2 years, dividing her time between the Farm & Equine practice and Pride Veterinary Centre.

Susan does not own any animals, but is the owner

of a husband and 6 year old daughter! In her spare time, she is a Brownie and Rainbow leader, having been involved in Guiding for over 20 years, and she sings with Rock Choir, recently singing at Wembley Stadium and NEC in Birmingham.

Christmas Grotto & Shopping Night at Pride Veterinary Centre

Thursday 3rd December 2015 - 5:30pm until 8pm

- Frozen Themed Grotto - Meet Elsa, Anna & Olaf
- Christmas Gift Market
- Exotic Wildlife Workshop
- Children's Lucky Dip
- Vintage Tea Room
- Raffle
- And much more!

FarmSkills Courses

FarmSkills training days involve educating farmers through workshops and discussion groups, and aim to provide a consistent delivery, so farmers can be sure they will learn about the same things in a similar way, no matter where they live in the country.

Increasingly with farm assurance, you are expected to prove your training and expertise. With FarmSkills, you will receive a certificate of completion for each module to display in your herd health plan.

Each module costs £15 + VAT per person and includes lunch.

To book your place, please contact our reception team on 01332 294929.



Calf rearing from birth to weaning

Wednesday 25th November 2015 with Rose Jackson

Our popular calf rearing course focusing on colostrum management and practical heifer rearing targets.

The how's, what's & whys of veterinary medicine (responsible use of medicines)

Wednesday 2nd December 2015 with Emily Robinson

This interactive course aims to give you the tools to be able to decide which animals require treatment, and what the appropriate drug and dose might be. More importantly it will help you decide which animals do not need antibiotic treatment and which drugs you should not use! Ultimately the end result should be a happy, healthy, resistance free herd of cattle... Which means more money in your pocket!

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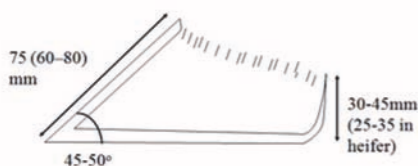
Calling all foot trimmers!

Carolyn Baguley MA VetMB
CertAVP (Cattle) MRCVS



Following some recent research from Nottingham Vet School, there's been a change of recommendation for Step 1 of the 5-step Dutch Trimming Method. It's now thought that the old 75mm is too short for most cows. It's proposed that the minimum recommended claw length of any adult

Holstein-Friesian dairy cow should be increased to at least 90mm, measured from the junction of the top of the horn and the skin, when trimming the toe to a point. If a step is left at the toe, the minimum length should be 85mm.



The new recommended front wall length has changed from 75mm (above) to at least 90mm.

Markeaton

Christmas Coffee Morning

Join us on Friday 11th December for our Christmas Coffee Morning at the Scarsdale Farm & Equine practice, Markeaton Lane, Derby.

We will have cakes, tea & coffee, mulled wine, carols and a raffle. You can also take advantage of a 10% discount on shop products whilst you are here.

10am-1pm



Transition Cow Management

Oli Maxwell BVSc BSc (Hons) MRCVS

Transition cow management has been the dairy buzzword of the past few years.



The importance of the period around calving seems to grow with every new study into any of the major production diseases. Mastitis, lameness, metabolic disease and fertility issues can all have roots in the management of cows in the month immediately before and after calving, and most of these conditions are now known to be heavily associated with energy balance and body condition score loss.

Of course good transition cow management alone cannot compensate for shortfalls in other areas of animal husbandry, but it is vital in order to set the cow up for a successful lactation - like Usain Bolt getting a good start in the 100m, it makes the rest of the job a lot easier if you aren't having to catch up!

Assuming that the dry cows are in optimal body condition (2.5-3), the main aims of the transition period are:

- 1) Maximise dry matter intakes to ensure a healthy appetite post calving.
- 2) Prepare the rumen for the milking cow ration.
- 3) Prepare the cow's calcium metabolism for the increased demands of lactation.
- 4) Provide her with a clean and comfortable environment to maximise lying times and minimise the chances of picking up udder infections.

Going into all of these in detail would take too long for this article (there are entire text books on the subject!), but there are some fundamental targets to aim for:

Lying space - On loose straw yards, cows should have 1.25m² per 1000l of production of lying space which should be bedded daily. This does not include feed passages or loafing areas.

Feed space - There should be 1m of feed space per cow and feed in front of them at all times.

Disease rates - Mastitis: for every 12 cows which calve, only 1 should have a case of mastitis in the first 30 days.

Ketosis: Fewer than 10% of cows should suffer from subclinical ketosis as measured by milk or blood tests in the first 3 weeks after calving.

The negative effects of subclinical and clinical ketosis on dairy businesses are well documented. Poor transition management and high levels (over 30%) of subclinical ketosis will lead to increased rates of (and increased severity of) mastitis, more LDAs, increased claw horn lameness through condition score loss, increased levels of infectious lameness in the herd and increased fertility problems.

The best way to monitor the transition period on the farm is by a combination of blood or milk ketone testing in the first 3 weeks post-calving, and body condition scoring of both the dry cows and the peak lactation cows to assess body condition loss. Both of these are easily achieved at the routine visit, so talk to your routine vet about how best to monitor and manage the transition period in your herd.



Feed Barrier Management

Jennie Lomas BVSc MRCVS

A well-designed feed barrier allows maximum access to feed and reduces the effects of competition, which include poor nutrition, lameness as a result of increased standing times and injuries caused by pushing and shoving.

What to aim for in a good feed barrier:

- Smooth, easy-clean surfaces. No sharp edges!
- Regular cleaning, right down to the bottom. Inedible, poor quality and mouldy feedstuffs build up easily, and can have a huge impact on health.
- Neck rail offset forwards by 20-30cm, and 120-150cm (adults) or 90-110cm (younger cattle) from the ground. The animal's neck should not touch the top rail while feeding. Look for hair loss and swelling over the back of the neck - these suggest the rail requires adjusting. Flexible straps or ropes can replace neck rails and are more comfortable for the cows.
- Enough space for the number and size of stock - see the table.
- Troughs with a 20% incline facilitate feed staying within reach, and prevent 'sorting' of mixed feeds.
- Trough or brisket boards should be approximately 50cm high for adult cattle with a smooth finish (any higher will cause obstruction to the neck when eating).
- Raise trough or feed surface 10-15cm above foot height, to relieve excess pressure on the feet and neck.
- Push up feed regularly if there is no trough.
- Locate feed barrier close to the resting areas - this will encourage lying time and reduce bullying.
- The area behind the feed barrier should be as clean as possible (ideally clean concrete), to reduce dirty feet and legs which will increase the potential for infectious foot conditions and mastitis.
- Good vermin control and no access to badgers!

Don't cut corners with feed barriers. Pay attention to detail. The list might sound basic, but it's often ignored and can make a massive difference to intakes, efficiency and stock health.



Figure 1

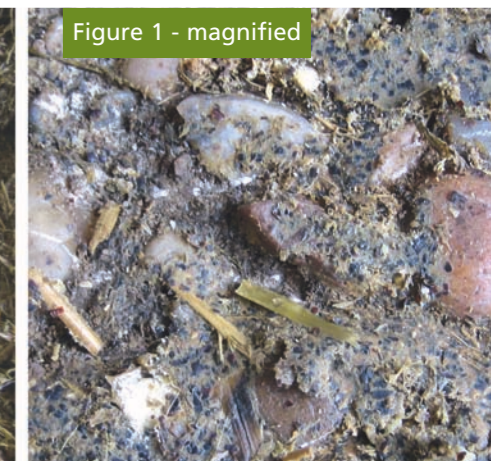


Figure 1 - magnified

This concrete feed surface looks nice and smooth from a distance, but a closer look reveals how rough it actually is. Over time, the acidic silage has dissolved the cement between the stones, leaving them jutting out. This causes two problems - firstly, damage to the tongue and mouth from the rough stones, and secondly, old, rotting feed matter building up in the gaps. Not a good way to end a meal!

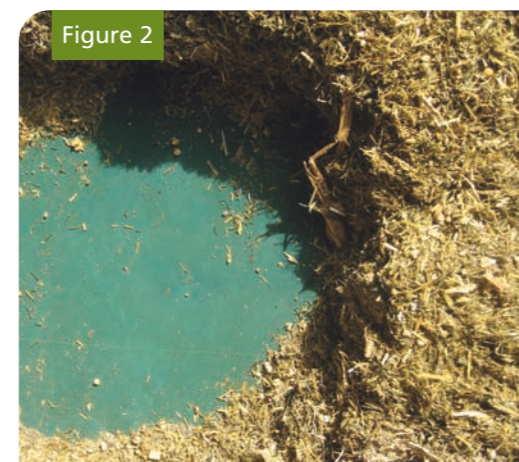


Figure 2



Figure 2 - magnified

A resin-covered feed surface. This is a genuinely smooth, hard surface, which is much kinder on the mouth, and is far easier to keep properly clean. Feed wastage is greatly reduced, and there is no build-up of gone-off feed.

Animal weight (kg)	Width of feed barrier (cm per animal)	Ad-lib feeding (cm per animal)
200	40	15
300	50	15
400	55	17
500	55	22
600	60	26
700	70	30
800	80	34

Feed barrier width requirements for different weights of cattle. Don't forget to exclude any posts or stanchions from your calculations - these don't count as effective feed space! Table adapted from Red Tractor Beef and Lamb Assurance Standards (2011).

