

Farm news



Rose Jackson BVSc DBR MRCVS

AI vs natural service in beef herds

AI is used far less commonly in beef herds compared to the dairy industry. Reasons for this include perceived costs compared to a stock bull, difficulty with heat detection whilst out at grass and lack of handling facilities to get cows in to serve them.

However there are major benefits, which include increased genetic gain, breeding heifers specifically for replacements (good maternal traits rather than terminal sire traits) and improved calving ease.

There are two ways to overcome the heat detection issue:

- 1. Use a teaser bull:** A young bull (ideally <12 months) has an operation performed to remove a portion of the epididymis (the storage and transport tube for sperm). He still has his testicles so will show mounting behaviour; a chin ball marker is then used to identify cows that he has mounted.
- 2. Synchronising groups of cattle for fixed time AI (FTAI):** Progesterone device protocols (e.g. CIDR-synch) are the most successful in beef cows and heifers. This usually involves two visits from us followed by a pre-booked visit from the AI technician and we usually achieve >50% pregnancy rate to the first service.



We currently have a special fixed price of £25 per cow (plus the visit charge) which includes the cost of the drugs. Please speak to one of our vets for the most appropriate protocol for your farm.

Practical tips for top AI results

We are quick to blame cows for poor fertility rates but we don't often review AI techniques. Correct timing of insemination is important; the am/pm rule is still helpful but it is old advice, first demonstrated in 1943! Only 50% of Holstein cows will show standing to be mounted (STBM) therefore it is important to optimise heat detection, insemination technique and semen quality. 94% of ovulations are 16–40 hours after onset of heat; the recommendation for sexed semen is to AI 14–20 hours after observed heat.

- Check your flask! Shouldn't lose >1cm liquid nitrogen per week
- Thawing technique: 35–37°C for minimum 45 seconds
- Insert straw into a pre-warmed gun
- AI cow within 10 minutes; thaw one straw at a time
- Semen should be placed in the body of the uterus not in the horns

For more information call our practice on **01332 294929** or email farmandequine@scarsdalevets.com

Poisonous plant of the month: Onion

I like onions. I particularly like them in November when they're fried and on my hot dog at a firework display.

Onions, however, can be toxic to animals – I once had to treat a very ill spaniel that had stolen a salad containing a small amount of onion. Thankfully, she survived and recovered, but some animals with onion toxicity aren't so lucky.

Onions (and garlic, too) cause the red blood cells to lyse, or burst, leading to anaemia. Clinical signs include weakness, staggering, inappetence, rapid breathing and heart rate, dark brown urine, pale or yellow mucous membranes and – unsurprisingly – onion breath. Secondary kidney failure can occur, and pregnant animals may abort. Toxicity can happen as a result of a one-off onion feeding session, or from smaller amounts ingested over a longer time. Raw, cooked, dehydrated and powdered onions or garlic can all have the same effect.

Both cattle and sheep are susceptible, and poisoning may happen from grazing onions or wild garlic, from deliberately or inadvertently feeding onions to livestock or from allowing animals access to stored onions. Onions can be quite tasty, and stock may eat large amounts in one go.

Affected animals should be removed from the onions. Multivitamin injections and iron can help, and blood transfusions can be given in severe cases – give us a ring if you need any advice!

Humans aren't affected by onions in the same way, which is good news for me and my hot dog. No feeding leftovers to pets this bonfire night, though!



Carolyn Baguley MA VetMB CertAVP (Cattle) MRCVS



Preventing problems in fresh calvers

If you see cases of milk fever, metritis, mastitis, ketosis or displaced abomasum soon after calving, it might be time to review how you treat fresh calvers.

For every clinical milk fever you see, there are typically ten other cows with subclinical hypocalcaemia. This milder calcium deficit does not cause clinical milk fever, but does increase the risk of other diseases.

The cows most at risk of hypocalcaemia are high yielders, Channel-Islanders, older and over-conditioned ones, and those that had milk fever, ketosis, metritis or retained placenta in the last lactation. They should be singled out for special treatment. Give them at least 100g of oral calcium. The simplest way is to use drenches or boluses. Three boluses, one at the first sign of calving, one afterwards and one 12–15 hours later, should provide sufficient calcium.

Giving drenches or boluses can involve quite a lot of handling. You may want to consider getting a pump and pump-drenching fresh calvers. It may take longer than giving a bolus, but you handle the cow only once. The advantage is that you can deliver a large dose of calcium, plus glucogenic energy to reduce the risk of ketosis, and rehydrate the cow, all in one go. Dehydrated cows have a reduced appetite, so rehydration is useful to further reduce the risk of milk fever and



ketosis. There are various formulae for pumping. We recommend SELEKT Fresh Cow 500, because it provides more calcium and glucogenic energy than any of the others.

Cows that don't take the drink when offered should be pumped. If you want to know more about which cows to treat, ask one of the vets for more advice.



November events

First Aid for the Smallholder

Tuesday 6th November

Alpaca Blood Donation Session

Monday 12th November

FarmSkills Courses

Module 1 – Take Control of Mastitis: Selective Dry Cow Therapy and Beyond!
Wednesday 7th November 2018

Module 2 – Getting Ahead with Genetics and Genomics: A Practical approach to Improving your Herd's Potential
Wednesday 14th November 2018

Module 3 – Heifer Rearing from Calving to First Service: Keeping Track of Your Progress
Wednesday 21st November 2018

For more information on our upcoming events visit: <http://bit.ly/2L7PIOV>

Farm and Equine Centre
Markeaton Lane, Markeaton, Derby DE22 4NH
01332 294929

Allstree
01332 554422

Pride Veterinary Centre
01332 678333

Duffield
01332 841700

Shelton Lock
01332 700321

Hilton
01283 732999

Stapenhill
01283 568162

Mickleover
01332 518585

Stretton
01283 565333

Oakwood
01332 666500