

March 2011

## Dairy Cow Fertility - Improving Herd Submission Rates

It is increasingly difficult to get cows back in calf. To ensure your herd bucks this trend, concentrate your efforts where the greatest return will be seen. It is hard to manipulate conception rates but you will see significant benefits by improving your heat detection and submission rates.



The submission rate is the proportion of eligible cows which are served in a given period.

A realistic target submission rate for an all the year around calving herd is greater than 75%.

If you had 100 cows that are ready for service and conception rate is 40% and submission rate is 40% then the number of pregnant cows will be 16.

However, if the conception rate is 40% and submission rate is improved to 75% then the number of pregnant cows will be 30.

### What can be done to improve submission rates?

- Don't let the voluntary "wait" period get too long. Moving from 100 days to 50 days allows two extra services.
- Watch the cows for three periods of 20 minutes daily, and particularly during quiet periods of the day.
- Make sure cows are easily identifiable with clear freeze brands and lighting is good.
- Use heat mount detectors, such as Kamars, both for first service and returns.
- Record all bullings.
- Ensure the cows have a non slip loafing area where they can show confident bulling behaviour.

### Routine Fertility Visits

Please remember we offer special terms for regular visits to help manage your herd's fertility.

If you are interested and require further information, please speak to John Cammack, John Kirk or Gill in the first instance.

## Calf Scour a problem?

Calves are born without any immunity to infection and are reliant on antibodies adsorbed from colostrum. Calves which don't get enough of these antibodies are more likely to suffer from scour, pneumonia and septicaemia.



If you are having scour problems then the following are important:

- **Colostrum:** 2-3 litres of good quality colostrum in the first six hours followed by another 2-3 litres of first milking colostrum in 8 hours time. If the calves won't suck then use a feeder bag. We have tested antibody levels in calves and found less than 50% get enough!
- Treat navels with tincture of iodine ASAP.
- Remove the calf from the calving area ASAP and put in a clean pen. Calves get most of the scour bugs from their mothers.
- Regularly clean and disinfect calving areas and rotate where you calve cows.
- Bring several fresh scour samples in to get a diagnosis so any specific treatments or preventative vaccinations can be instigated.

## Feeding Scouring Calves

Traditionally scouring calves are taken off milk and fed electrolytes only for several days. Unfortunately most of the electrolyte solutions have minimal energy levels and calves are effectively starved which can cause weight loss and delay their recovery.

It is recommended that calves stay on full milk rations and are fed additional electrolytes. Most electrolyte products must be fed at separate times to milk, as they interfere with the milk clotting in the calf's stomach.

**Rehydion Gel** is a very useful electrolyte replacement solution as it can be added directly to milk or diluted with water and fed in the same way as other electrolyte products.



**Mild Scours:** Normal milk feeds with added Rehydion Gel or morning and afternoon milk as normal with an extra 2 litres of electrolytes at lunchtime.

**Severe scour:** Offer milk morning and afternoon and feed 2 litres of electrolytes at lunchtime and evening.

Please note that Rehydion can be used neat so is particularly useful for suckler calves which can then be left with their mothers.

## Forthcoming Meeting on Calf Health

We are holding a meeting on Calf Health on the 22nd March at the Doveridge Village Club.

The meeting will start at 8pm and all are welcome.

Please let the Farm office know if you are able to attend to assist with the catering arrangements.