

St David's Farm Newsletter

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Bull breeding examinations – why, when and how?

Bull breeding examinations should be an essential prerequisite not just for newly purchased animals but also as part of your annual active health planning – a bull fertile last year may not be fertile now.



It is invaluable in both suckler herds and for sweeper bulls in dairy units. As many as two in five bulls may be subfertile – which means more services are required and calving intervals are extended.

Eblex figures suggest tightening the calving period in seasonal suckler herds can increase returns by up to £60 per cow. MDC data from the dairy industry shows that a prolonged calving interval costs between £2 and £8 per day over 365 days.

Bulls should be examined at least one month before the breeding season begins. For year round calving herds examine bulls annually or more frequently if there is any doubt about his performance. New bulls should ideally be tested prior to purchase. If testing on arrival this should be done during the period of at least three weeks quarantine before they are required to start work.

There are several parts to a full breeding examination:

- **Libido:** The assessment of bulls mating drive and ability should be a measured one. This can easily be done by the farmer in the presence of a cow in oestrus. The timing and behaviour until the point of service is very important. We can either supply a checklist for you or can do the assessment ourselves – if necessary synchronising some cows in advance to ensure we have a cow bulling at the time.

- **Physical examination:** This includes assessing condition score, feet, eyesight, heart and legs. Many bulls don't perform due to lameness! The penis, prepuce, scrotum and testicles are examined. Injuries and infection are another common cause of infertility in previously proven bulls. The accessory glands can be felt on rectal examination. The above tests alone will pick up about 60% of infertile bulls.
- **Scrotal circumference:** Size matters and we can measure the bull against standards for his age and breed.
- **Semen examination:** Sampling is by electroejaculation and the semen will be assessed under the microscope on farm immediately for quality and back at the practice for abnormalities.
- **Disease testing:** If necessary at the time we can blood sample for IBR, BVD, Lepto and Johnes and carry out a preputial sample for Campylobacter if required.
- **Classification:** We will classify the bull as satisfactory, unsatisfactory or requiring further testing and fully discuss and problems found.

The introductory price for this service is £150 (excl VAT) for one bull, £250 for two and £75 for each additional bull. Prices include the visit charge but exclude any additional blood testing or preputial sampling.



Risk factors for calf SCOUR

Calf scour outbreaks are complicated with often more than one infection present and many management factors increasing susceptibility to disease.



Organisms present on one farm cause disease yet do not on another. Control therefore involves looking for the infectious agents involved as well as correcting the management factors allowing these infections to cause disease.

Taking good samples from untreated cases should help us isolate and treat the virus/bacteria/parasite involved, and recent studies have added to our knowledge of the management factors involved.



Management factors associated with more risk of scour:

- Calving problems – calves from difficult calvings are nearly twice as likely to develop scour. A major factor in this is no doubt slowness to suck, so best practice is to stomach tube these calves with colostrum straight away.
- Time with dam – in the study there was 54 % more scour in calves that remained with the cow for more than one hour, a reminder that the organisms causing scours come from cow faeces. This study also proved a link between calf scour and cow dirtiness. Thus calving pen management is important to improve cow and calf hygiene.
- Calves kept in groups were 3.2 times more likely to develop scours than those kept in pairs or singularly, even better was preventing contact between the pens.
- Wet bedding gave two times the scours, if asked to live in slums they will get sick. Clean, dry conditions lead to less stress.
- Scours are more common in milk fed calves showing that the management is not as good or clean as natural feeding. With a stomach of 1.5litres calves fed 2-3litres twice daily do not have the stomach capacity to manage these large feeds without overspill into the intestine, where milk fermentation causes upsets. Also, sucking calves will be drinking 6-7litres daily in the first week and this will increase so are calves on milk replacer getting enough? If they're having 4-6litres daily the answer is probably not. It is very important to feed at the same time, the same temperature and the same order from buckets cleaned daily.

Having adequate colostrum intake is vital yet 50% calves still do not get enough. Particularly calves born in the

evening or at night are at risk since they may not get colostrum until the next morning well after the six hour window. Remember six pints in six hours and if in any doubt after two hours stomach tube the desired amount. It is good practice to test calves 2-7days old to measure their levels of protection. We can also test the quality of your colostrum, if below par we could look at dry cow management or vaccination to boost it. Why not get in touch to make sure your calves are protected.



Another point of note with colostrum is that it is a very effective medium to grow bacteria in so must be chilled quickly and stored cleanly.

In studies there were other factors identified lowering the risk of scours:

- Disinfection of pens gave 40 % less scours – an all in all out policy is best.
- Continued colostrum feeding for the first two weeks is protective of the calf intestine. The lining of the intestine are renewed every four days and this new unprotected lining is the reason why many calves are affected by scour in the second week of life. Continued colostrum feeding protects the new gut lining although not absorbed around the body.
- Hay/straw introduced early and fed from a rack lowers scour incidence. Concentrate feed does also, coarse mix can be fed ad lib although pellets should be restricted because of the risk of gorging.

Dairy cow and dairy youngstock numbers

When I first saw these figures I thought they were stating the obvious. But on closer inspection they raise some interesting issues.

I think we have all been aware of the acute shortage of dairy cows to buy and the dramatic effect this has had on prices. These figures also highlight the fact that there could well be a shortage of dairy replacements coming through again we are seeing this reflected in the buying price.

What are the implications? Where will replacements come from and at what price? Will we ever reach quota again? I guess the dairy replacement situation could well ease as more dairy farmers that have not traditionally bred their own replacements will do so. This will obviously take time but could help alleviate the situation. The question of will we reach quota again is a more difficult question to answer.

With just under 2,000,000 dairy cows and a national quota of 14,000,000,000 litres who knows. All I would say is that if the cow numbers and the national quota stay the same that equates to an average yield of just over 7,000 litres. We aren't quite at the 7,000 litre average yet but we are not very far from it. With quota price at a negligible level at the time of writing this article, buying it might just be worth considering.

Of note is the source of the UK cow numbers. All data is obtained from Defra and since June 2005 the method of collection uses the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) for England and Wales, the equivalent APHIS system in Northern Ireland and survey data from Scotland. This has meant that figures and categories vary significantly from those listed before.



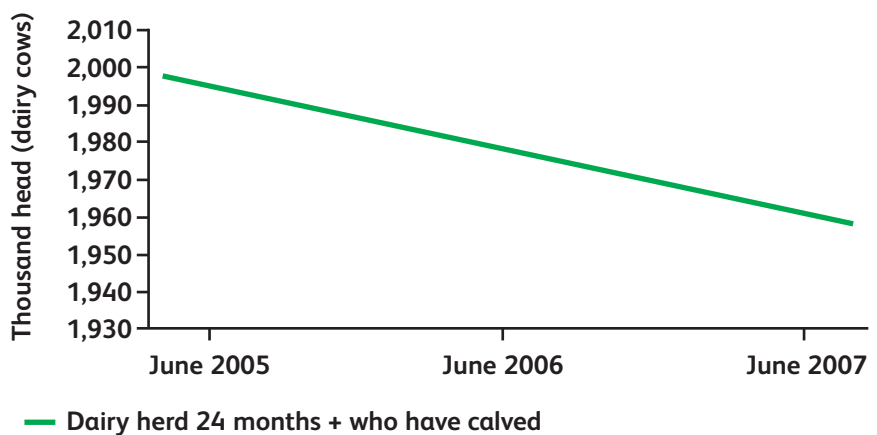
At present the only figures available from the new system are for June 2005, 2006 and 2007. These figures show that the number of cows in dairy herds have fallen 1% each year, with June 2007 at 1.956 million, a fall of 23,000 cows from June 2006. This is likely to explain part of the continuing fall in milk production. However, although production has reduced, the overall effect of the fall in cow numbers is being lessened by the increase in the average yield of the remaining cows. The average milk yield of a cow increased 2.0% between 2004/5 and 2005/6 to 6,798litres/year. Yields also

increased a further 0.3% between 2005/6 and 2006/7 to reach 6,815litres/year.

Figures show that dairy cow numbers continue to fall across all subgroups, with the exception of a small increase of 1,000 other female cattle in June 2006. This continuing fall in cow numbers may in part be due to the continuing decline in the number of producers, the number of producers in June 2006 stood at 13,778. This has fallen by 6.6% to 12,867 producers in June 2007.

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Number of dairy cows



Thousand head	Jun-05	Jun-06	Jun-07
Dairy herd	1,998	1,979	1,956
Other female cattle (24mths + who have not calved or are in calf for the first time)	475	476	430
Female dairy cattle 12mths - 24mths	529	504	479

Raw material update

Take cover now or be patient

Those of you who have already covered your requirements for summer and next winter must be pleased and can relax in the fact that it is done. But what if you have no cover in place?

Do you grab it now and just get it done, or wait because surely it will drop back at some time, bearing in mind that over the last few months soya has risen by over £80/t. Yes there is a possibility the soya price will reduce in the near future, but how much will it rise until then?

Soya: Remains a very bullish market with high demands worldwide and reduced end of year stocks for the US and Brazilian crops, combined with exchange rate changes this all adds up to a relentless upward market. As the newsletter goes to print a strike by Argentine farmers and ports is badly effecting physical stock of soya in the UK. If this dispute isn't solved quickly, the late arrival of shipments will cause a problem possibly over the next couple of months. Due to this spot prices have spiked to over £300 p/t but no doubt

Raw material prices

	January 08	February 08	March 08
Hipro soya	£252	£261	£265
Argy soya	£252	£261	£265
Sugar beet	£176	£182	£185
Soya hulls	£145	£145	£157
Rapeseed meal	£170	£190	£196
Wheat	£178	£184	£184
Barley	£171	£177	£177

once the strike is settled the markets will return to it's regular level.

Sugar beet: It has now been confirmed that the availability of beet for this summer is practically nil, only whats beeing held in store will be available. A good grazing season will put pressure on high digestible fibre (HDF) type raw materials so to cover now might not be a bad thing. The possibility of price increases for both Wheatfeed and Soya Hulls I suggest are strong and with Hulls being caught up in the Argentine strike surely will not help.

Wheat and barley: Grain prices have generally been static but over the last couple of weeks the market just looks alittle bearish. Forward price of approximately £150/t delivered for November 2008 seems a little heavy

considering a big increase in plantings and hopefully better weather this year.

Molasses: Deliveries remain a problem but are improving with extra vehicles on the road. Forward prices should still be looking very favourable against other energy feeds.

Rapeseed meal: Rapeseed prices have jumped approximately £20/t over the last month or two caused by news of China's own crop being badly affected by weather conditions. Traders quickly bought into the market pushing prices up to £200/t during February. At this level some producers may decide not to use it, choosing to replace it with perhaps Palm Kernel or high protein molasses.

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