St David's Farm Newsletter

July 2007

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In this issue:

Bull fertility

A few issues ago I discussed heat detection. This is an ongoing favourite with all vets and most farmers are sick of hearing us moan about it!

I mentioned bulls in the same article – "Bulls are a great reason for no heat detection! The bulls will take care of everything!" I had a good response to the article but have been prompted to discuss bull fertility specifically by recent experiences.

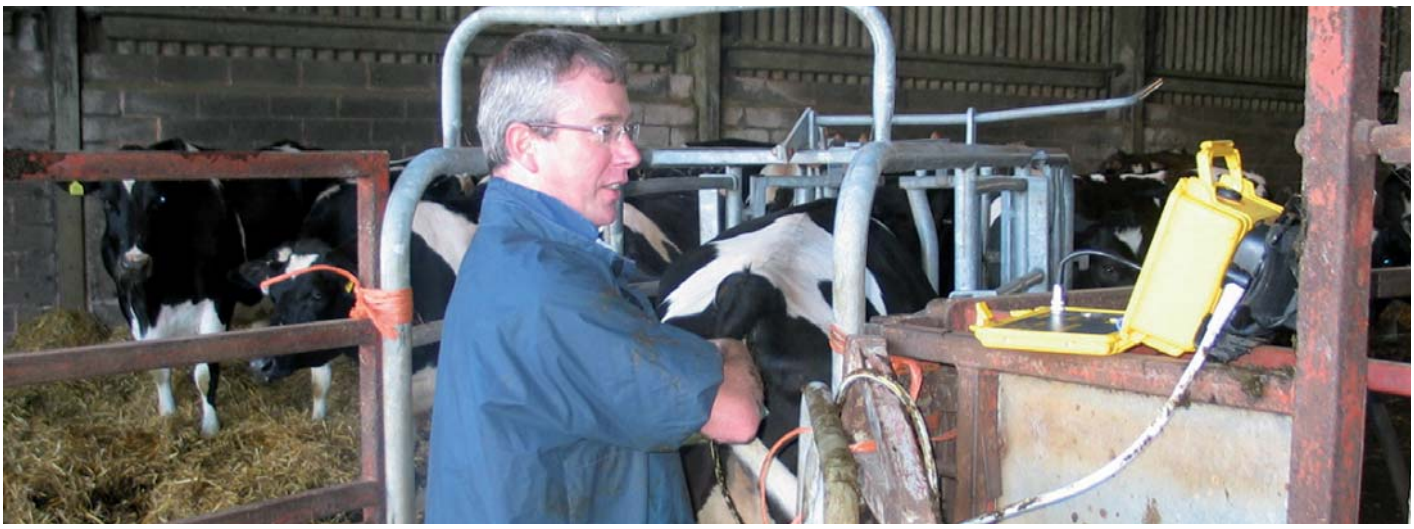
In my opinion dairy herds cannot rely on bulls for efficient fertility. Dairy herds need both a good calving index and a good supply of replacements to run efficiently. We can argue about an efficient calving index but whatever the figure you cannot rely on the bull to keep it steady for you.

An efficient calving index requires a good calving to first service interval and a good submission rate. This does not necessarily require veterinary intervention but our intervention is very limited if a bull is running. When presented with a cow 120 days post calving and not seen bulling our options are very limited – if she is normal she may be cycling or early in calf.

To ensure she is served we would use Prostaglandin to bring her on heat, this is not an option with a bull running as this will cause abortion. This cow could easily run to over 200 days before we can confirm she is or is not in calf – Calving Index 470 days!

Bull Power is an issue. If you are running a bull with 100 cows then you are expecting him to work hard. There are the usual issue of harem's forming etc. If there are more than three cows bulling on one day will the bull serve them all? Will you back up with AI? If the bull goes lame what do these herds do – AI? In both cases the answer is no – the bull will take care of everything! Time lost and the calving interval extended again. Submission rates will be affected if there are too many cows bulling.

Another issue is accurate calving dates. With most herds running bulls we are presented with some service dates. If we are scanning regularly then we can give accurate dates as early scanning is more accurate. If we only pregnancy diagnosis the cows occassionaly then dates are harder to be accurate with. Beyond four months it is more difficult to give accurate calving dates. Thus drying off cows can be more difficult – too often the vet is blamed but my argument is that we are doing our best in difficult circumstances.



What about dairy replacements? You can run a dairy bull but these certainly seem more dangerous. You need a good number of replacements of good quality and of even size. With a bull you have little choice over genetics and the bull is expected to last for two or three years. You will also have replacements all year round so you will have an uneven group of heifers to manage.

What to do? For clients running a bull I have had some success with a five week on/five week off option. They run the bull for five weeks and then AI for five weeks. At the end of the AI period we scan the cows that have been inseminated and any not seen bulling. We can confirm any not in calf and treat these safely with prostaglandin. If there are too many these must be inseminated as the bull will not cope.

Best solution – train to do your own AI. If you can AI your own cows you have complete control but only yourself to blame!! You will have more of an interest in the cows – heat detection will be essential as there will be no bull to take care of it for you. Two clients have recently trained in DIY AI – one young and one not so young. Both have been inseminating for four months and the results have been very good. The initial cost may seem high – course cost, time, flask and straws. But the benefits are greater – more understanding of the cows, more interest in heat detection, good selection of genetics etc.

Thank you to Lord Rowhorne for the AI experiences!

Tony O'Loughlin 07970492250

Health Planning Project updates

Just a reminder that the first meeting to launch the Health Planning Project for dairy clients in the Exeter area is at The Gisson's Arms in Kennford on Wednesday July 11th from 12pm until 2pm. Lunch is provided! Please call Jayne in the office to book your space.

The meeting for dairy clients in the Bridgwater area is on Wednesday August 15th at The Globe in North Petherton from 12.30pm until 2.30pm. A buffet lunch will be provided.

A meeting specifically to discuss health planning for beef clients will be held at The Gissons Arms, Kennford on Wednesday August 22nd from 12pm to 2pm.

Emily Simcock 07968305227

On farm record keeping

Drug traceability is becoming ever more important. To improve individual animal records, and also communication between vets attending the same case, we will soon be starting to use new invoice slips.

These will provide an on farm record including - details of the animals treated, drugs used, batch numbers, any further instructions and case notes for future reference. The vet will fill these in at the visit and a copy will be filed on-farm.

The sheets are hole-punched and we will provide files for these to be kept in. The files will also contain useful contact information about the vets and a handy list of withholding times.

We hope you will find these new invoices and files helpful both for continuity and for your record keeping. We expect to start using the invoices on farm from mid-July. The vets will be delivering the files during July.

What's it worth? Grazing sampling results – June 07

No results for Devon and Cornwall this month due to a lack of samples, and only one from Dorset means it's difficult to draw too many conclusions!

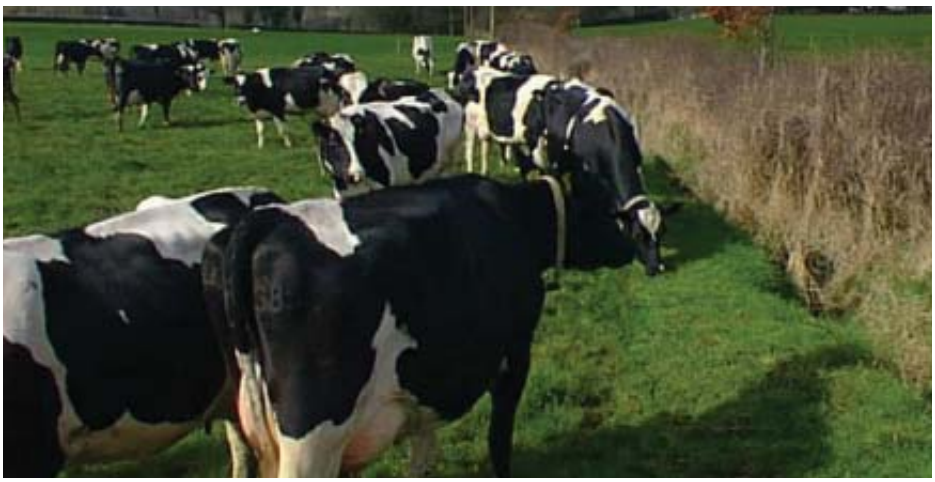
If you want to see some results then badger a rep to get them sent from your farm or your region.

What I can comment on is my area of Somerset's results, which continue to decline in energy over previous months whilst protein seems to be holding on if not slightly increasing. The erratic weather trend has made it a very difficult month for grazing as conditions for eating have been tricky to say the least. Some herds have been back in to avoid too much mess making.

	DM %	ME (MJs/kg)	CP %	Sugars % fresh
Somerset	18.6	11.2	24.1	1.6
Dorset	20.8	10.0	15.6	1.9
Average	19.7	10.7	19.9	1.8
07 season average	18.3	11.6	21.3	–

Many producers are waiting for a consistent spell of favourable weather to allow pressing on with 2nd cut silage. This has added more pressure on grazing, as much ground is tied up with "would-be second cut aftermaths" which are obviously yet to materialise. All of this provides a frustrating situation, especially with milk prices increasing, and the need to keep cows milking as we approach and move into the higher seasonality months.

Charlie King 07917 203790



Cracking the grazing conundrum

How often do we hear about "making the best use of grazed grass?" Well personally – very regularly, especially this time of year, and especially this year, with ever increasing raw material prices. So how do we go about doing this?

Firstly it is useful to have some idea of grazing quality hence our monthly grazing monitor feature. We then know that we have and level of crude protein, at a given ME, at a certain dry matter. This all sounds very simple so far. Until that is, we take into account that all of these values will vary often daily, along with sugar and fibre levels etc... That's where things start to get more difficult to manage.

Secondly (and vitally) is to have control over grazing intakes. Intakes will fluctuate, depending on so many other factors. i.e. weather conditions, quantity available to graze, quality of grass, time of year etc...

In a winter ration we wouldn't dream of messing around with quantities and quality of feedstuffs in such a fashion, i.e.

Day 1 Normal ration.
Day 2 Chuck a hosepipe in the wagon for five minutes then add an extra 200kgs of rapemeal to the mix.
Day 3 Feed half of the normal ration.
Day 4 Drop Megalac out and massively reduce energy density.
Day 5 More rapemeal.
Day 6 Normal ration.
Day 7 Hello hosepipe again.

What a week! Yet this is the challenge grazing poses to us.

However, these are problems and not answers. The "answer" that is often banded around is buffer feeding. Buffer feeding being 10-15 kgs of silage or TMR to try and even out the variance in grazing intake, stabilising fibre and thus milk butterfat levels. I feel that buffer feeding should be turned on its head for high yielding cows, especially from here on in the season.

Grazing should be the "buffer" to a sensible fixed level of TMR. By "sensible" I am talking about 30kgs+ this time of year. And I don't believe you when you tell me "they won't eat it." They will if you control them to eat it. Get them in earlier and make them eat it. You control them, not the other way around!

Now I'm conscious that I sound like a grazing basher. I'm not. In my opinion grazing is brilliant for the right breed of

cow and even for high yielding cows in part and in late lactation. In these instances it will help reduce feed costs and maximise production. However with high yielding cows in early lactation initial feed cost savings will soon be overwhelmed by the associated cost of condition loss and health and fertility issues. Why? Because with high yielding cows intake is the key to performance, condition and fertility. And with grazing we lose control of intake. Expectations of daily intake from grazing are all too often unrealistic.

A 45 litre cow needs 325 MJs of energy for maintenance and production. Let's say she eats a fixed maximum of 10kgs of dairy cake in the parlour a day which provides 130 Mjs. She therefore needs 195 Mjs from grazing.

It's a nice, warm dry day. Not too hot as heat stress will reduce intakes. Grass cover is ideal and energy is very high at 12.5ME/kg DM. 195/12.5 is 15.6 kgs dry matter intake required from grazing. Grass is 20% dry matter as conditions are dry and warm. 15.6/0.20 is 78kgs fresh weight of grass intake required on top of 10 kgs concentrate. That's 88kgs total intake on an absolutely excellent grazing day, bearing in mind a good winter TMR total intake is around 50 kgs fresh weight. And all of this is before we take into account the excess rumen degradable protein in the grass stripping condition off the cow.

So please be realistic about grazing expectations! Over-reliance and "making best use" are not the same thing!

Charlie King 07917 203790

Polish workers?

Do you have Polish workers who find it difficult to understand correct procedures in the milking parlour?

Farmer Guide leaflets in Polish are available free of charge for:

- Administration of Intramammary products
- California Milk Testing
- Teat disinfection
- Udder examination
- Sterile milk sampling

Contact Jayne at the practice if you would like copies of these leaflets. (They are also available in English too!)