

St David's Farm Newsletter

July 2009

In this issue:

Vocational Training Courses / Conception rates / The benefits of benchmarking

St David's Farm Practice Ltd,
Nutwell Estate, Lymington, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 5AN.

Vocational Training Courses

We are continuing to offer a range of small group, practical training courses for farmers and staff, 40% funded through the Vocational Training Scheme. The following courses are scheduled or planned, but we will put on courses in any area, or provide bespoke training for individual farms or groups of farms where there is enough interest.

DIY AI in association with Semex

August 10th – 13th, South Devon

This is a four day course run by vets from St David's Farm Practice under licence with Semex UK. On successful completion of the training students will be legally allowed to inseminate their own, or their employers bovine animals. The training comprises theory sessions, examination of reproductive tracts from post mortem samples, training in handling and thawing semen and five practical sessions with live cows. The next course is based at St David's Farm Practice for theory and farms in South Devon for the practicals. Student numbers are strictly limited to six per course so please get in touch early to book your place. The cost is £335* (including VAT and £75 worth of semen vouchers).

Calf Health Workshops

These popular, practical workshops have received incredibly positive reviews by the farmers attending, even those who had successfully reared calves for many decades. They are small group,



Students from the last AI course in May during their live cow practical at Old Parsonage Farm, Dartington.



on farm workshops usually run from about 10.30am – 3pm. Topics covered include: managing the calving cow for a healthy calf; colostrum policy; rearing and feeding of the newborn and care of sick calves. We will provide up-to-date evidence based advice on improving calf health alongside the opportunity to get hands on with practical skills like condition scoring, measuring colostrum quality, stomach tubing calves etc.

The cost is £25* which includes lunch and calf care equipment to take away. We have courses planned on farms in South Devon and the Okehampton area.

Mastitis for milkers

This workshop is designed to help milkers understand how cows get mastitis and how to reduce the number of cases, looking at both the environment and the milking routine. Treatment and care for clinical cases will be covered and there will be opportunities to review milking routines and get hands on training in testing and taking milk samples, assessing teat condition and correctly drying cows off.

The cost is £25* including equipment to take away. Courses are planned in Exeter and South Devon areas.



Foot trimming and lameness prevention

Foot trimming workshops are tailored to meet the experience of those attending but can include: looking at the causes and prevention of lameness; assessing the degree of lameness by locomotor scoring; routine trimming of overgrown feet and an introduction to trimming lame cows. Practical training is carried out using feet from the abattoir and live cows under close supervision.

If you are interested in attending any of these courses, or in being the host farm, particularly if you have an innovative system or ideas to share then please contact our office on **01392 872934**.

Some thoughts on conception rates

We all tend to think of conception rates in terms of how successful the sperm are at fertilising the egg in that one vital event. However, that event may not be the most important factor to consider in the outcome of a service, be that natural or AI.

Research shows that up to 90% of cows correctly identified in heat and served with good semen will be pregnant seven days after insemination.

Compare this with the conception rate on most dairy farms of around 35% i.e. 35% of cows served stay pregnant long enough to get PDED, and we can estimate that 55% of embryos die before becoming sustainable pregnancies!

These large numbers of embryonic deaths often result in 'normal' or only slightly abnormal return to heat and so are not regarded as embryonic losses.

Let us consider here some factors which may be leading to so many of these successfully fertilised embryos being lost resulting in perceived 'conception failure'.

Dairy heifers still achieve 60% conception rates and their much better performance compared to lactating

animals may be to do with the quality of the eggs they produce. With rising yields cows have slower follicle development and so these more mature eggs although often fertilised are more prone to early embryonic death. Further some studies have noted variation in these follicles development associated directly with nutrition and body condition score. Therefore it follows that good nutritional management to ensure cows have a constant diet and condition score will best manage these embryos. Put the other way, if the nutrition is not right, our cows calve in the wrong condition score and/or lose lots of condition we should not be surprised by poor conception rates even if we do get them to cycle! This takes us back to good management of conditions scores and dry cows so they have the best transition into milk possible



Cow comfort

- Adequate Nutrition
- Feed and Water access, plenty of space, feed pushed up often.
- Ventilation and Light
- Kind floors, good feet
- Stocking Density and social hierarchy
- Short Milking Times
- Stress

resulting in good conception rates when served 2-3 months later.

Lactation also causes a 40% increase in liver blood flow and so the fertility hormones a cow in milk produces are processed and removed quicker by the liver – these hormone levels are essential for embryo survival. Liver blood flow also increases by a further 20-30% within 2 hours of feeding resulting in a 30% fall in blood hormone – therefore if the interval between feeds is extended, or irregular or large meals given (eg slug in parlour), then the fall in hormones associated with this will reduce conception rates.

Constant ad lib feeding is best where dairy cows will eat 6-15 small meals/day each lasting 20-40mins so best protecting blood hormone levels. Very important in achieving this stable intake is cow comfort (see box on previous

page) and so we can see how cow comfort factors impact directly on conception rates.

Infectious disease levels on farm will also impact heavily on conception rates through embryo loss and so any investigation of poor fertility should include consideration of infectious agents and their impact.

Conception rates can be seen as a difficult and complicated area, but turning our attention to how best to maintain pregnancies shows that the principles of good dry cow management, nutrition, cow comfort and disease control are core as well as considering fertility issues. These factors are well within our control and so significant improvements possible, which are beneficial for wider cow health and production also.

Jeremy Hamilton 07843288610

St David's notice board!

We will have stands at the following shows over the Summer. Pop in and see us for a drink and a chat.

- The Totnes Show
Thursday, 30th July
- The Okehampton Show
Thursday, 13th August
- The Kingsbridge Show
Saturday, 5th September
- The Dairy Show, Shepton Mallet
Wednesday, 7th October



The benefits of benchmarking

Everyone who rears cattle or sheep likes to know how their herd or flock perform in comparison to other producers. Not only is this information interesting but it is also incredibly useful!

By comparing just a few facts and figures many underlying problems can be identified and solutions found which will significantly cut the cost of disease and raise production. With this in mind we want to encourage all our beef and sheep farmers to fill in answers to the questions and send them back to us. The data will be treated anonymously.

Once we have enough feedback we will be able to publish the averaged figures and show everyone who participates how their figures compare. The more people who participate the more useful and accurate the results will be so please fill in the questions on the reverse and send them back to us.

Thank you for your time.



Please complete the form on the reverse, fill out your details below and return it to: Paula Rogers, St David's Farm Ltd, Nutwell Estate, Lypstone, Exmouth, Devon EX8 5AN

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel. number: _____

Mobile number: _____

Email: _____

Dartington office

Remember, you can now collect your orders from our Dartington office, or just call in for a cup of tea!

Rhonda is based in the office Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9am until 5pm and on Thursdays until 12:30pm.

There are also Farm Vets based from the office to ensure a rapid response time to all calls.



Sheep

Number of breeding ewes? _____

When is your lambing period?

J F M A M J J A S O N D

How long is your lambing period? _____ weeks

Number (or %) of barren ewes? _____

Number of lambs born alive? _____

Number of lambs weaned? _____

Number of lambs finished? _____

Number of lambs sold as stores? _____

Culling/Replacement rate? _____

Beef

Number of breeding cows and heifers? _____

When is your calving period?

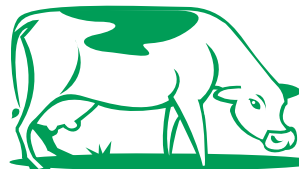
J F M A M J J A S O N D

How long is your calving period? _____ weeks

Number (or %) of barren cows? _____

Number of calves born alive? _____

Number of calves weaned? _____



St David's
Farm Practice