

Our Team



Mary Walters



Rhian Matthews



Morgan Richards



Tom Searle



Russell Fuller

Living And Working In Your Community

June 2021

Hello and welcome to the June Newsletter.

I hope you are all well and enjoying some long awaited sunshine. Seeing as we had April showers all of May, maybe we will have May weather in June!

Our out of hours has been extremely busy for the last few months – almost guaranteed to be hauled out of bed on a nightly basis. Our office hours are 8.30am-5.30pm, Monday to Friday, and outside of these hours, we are not at the office, rather working from home. This means we are not available for bill paying, making bookings or dispensing non urgent drugs. We are however always available for urgent calls 24 hours a day. From June onwards, if you call a vet into the office to dispense non urgent drugs, there will be a £10 surcharge to cover travelling expenses.

There is still Farming Connect money available to those of you registered with FC. This funding is designed to cover some veterinary investigations – we have been working with parasite control, trace element investigations, fertility testing (bull and ram), pelvic scoring heifers and iceberg diseases. If you have any issues that you are uncertain are covered by the funding please ring us to discuss, otherwise if you would like to apply, email Helen Lewis, helen.lewis@menterabusnes.co.uk directly to obtain a funding voucher before booking the work.

Mary

Sucker herd fertility

Suckler herd fertility has a direct impact on profitability. Improving fertility results in more calves to sell, and a shorter calving block means heavier calves at weaning – which is important with most calves fetching over £2 per kg liveweight. Calving cows early in a compact block also allows the uterus more time to prepare for another pregnancy, making the cow more likely to be in calf next year.

A fully functioning bull and cycling cows have already been covered in earlier editions of the newsletter but once calving has finished it is worth looking at the calving dates and records for the herd. Achievable targets i.e. this happens on real farms, are given below for comparison. Any shortfall offers an opportunity for improvement:

- Empty cows <5%
- Cows calving within 3 weeks of expected start date >65%
- Calving period – start to finish <12 weeks
- Assisted calvings in mature cows <5%

A short calving period is the simplest way to improve the herd's fertility. Bulls should only need to run with cows for 9 weeks, and with heifers for 6 weeks. Although this sounds short, don't forget that fertility is under genetic control, so this will automatically select for the most fertile cows.





Sian Fuller



Rachel Davies



Sian Lloyd



Helen Dando



Tracey Huntley

Cows calving outside the target period can be sold, with a calf at foot and replaced with a cow that calves at the right time.

A tight calving block also simplifies management: feeding becomes simpler as there are no dry cows hanging on at the end of calving; calf health is improved as there is no long term build up of infection in the shed; poor performing cows cannot hide in the herd; and finally, the bull should be out before he gets chance to serve his daughters...

Management to get a cow back in calf starts at weaning. A cow should be weaned so that she can reach a target body condition score (BCS) of 2.5 to 3.0 around 6 weeks before calving. After this she needs to be fed to maintain BCS, as it is during late pregnancy that next year's egg starts to develop. Underfeeding cows at this stage will result in poor quality eggs, leading to more empty cows, and extended calving intervals.

Controlling body condition also affects the number of difficult calvings – overfed cows will have large calves or be too fat to calve, whilst underfed cows may be too small, or too weak to calve unaided. This is important as any assistance at calving – farmer or vet, reduces the chance of the cow getting back in calf next year by over 50%.

The effect of a difficult calving is that the cow is more likely to have problems afterwards. These cause a further drop in egg quality, once again increasing the chance of the cow being empty at the end of the breeding season.

Bull choice is also important. At least 25% of UK bulls fail a pre-breeding fertility examination. With sperm production taking 60 days, any checks on the bull want to be done soon after the end of calving.

New bulls can now be selected on the basis of EBVs to generate a shortlist ahead of going to the sales. Low birth weight, short gestation length and high direct calving ease are key to getting a live calf on the ground without problems – it can always grow later. A further benefit of a short gestation length is that it gives the cow more time to recover after calving. More comprehensive indices are available but that will be in a later edition.

Finally, disease status has to be considered. BVD remains important, as the presence of a PI calf in the herd will have a huge impact on the number of pregnant cows, even if they are vaccinated. The Gwaredu scheme is great as it can screen the herd for problems, but don't forget that any bought in animals should be tested before introduction to the herd unless they come from accredited herds.

Lameness also has a huge effect on fertility. Lameness tends to cause cows to lose body condition, and via hormonal feedback produce poorer quality eggs, which are less likely to ovulate. The best time to organise a foot trim is at weaning but failing that getting cows trimmed before the bull goes in should be a priority. It is worth keeping records of which cows need trimming, as a suckler cow that sees the foot trimmer every time they come for trimming is probably not a 'good cow'...



If you would like any further information, as always, contact us for a chat.

Office opening hours

Monday – Friday
8.30am - 5.30pm

Emergency out of hours service

Weeknights 5.30pm - 8.30am
Saturday & Sunday all day