

Committed to UK Farming
EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE



FACT SHEET 06

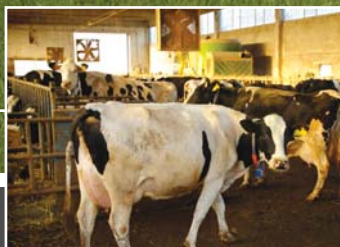
INFERTILITY PROBLEMS IN DAIRY HERDS

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INFERTILITY PROBLEMS

IN DAIRY HERDS



Every dairy farmer knows what happens on a day-to-day basis on the farm, and does not need computer print outs to tell if 10% of cows are aborting from five months of gestation onwards. However, these are useful to identify downward trends in heifer conception rates or to pin point when a particular bull (natural or AI) is not performing.

Disease control

All herds should either be vaccinating against the three major fertility bugs - BVD, Leptospira and IBR, or monitoring the levels of herd exposure to them by measuring bulk milk tank antibody levels every few months. This will allow judgement of whether the biosecurity measures taken to keep these infections out are working, or warn of an increasing disease level and prompt appropriate action. If your herd is not vaccinated against these diseases or not being monitored, then consult your vet now for advice, as these diseases can be cost-effectively controlled.

Nutrition

If the controllable diseases are under control, next look at nutrition.

Today we have a much better understanding of the cow's requirements and TMR has enabled a much better composition of the diet. However, the geneticists have foiled us by breeding cows that give so much milk they physically cannot eat enough to meet their requirements in the first 100 days or so of lactation. So they are in negative energy

balance which is not conducive to good conception rates. To resolve this, careful attention to detail is needed in managing cows' condition scores from late lactation through the transition period to calving, along with a carefully formulated diet to accommodate any poor silage will help. Blood profiles may be a useful way of monitoring the situation.

Heat detection

The most important part of getting cows in calf is heat detection. This needs to be accurate and timely and investments made in ways of improving your heat detection are well worth it.

Modern day dairy cows have reduced length of heat periods and weaker signs of heat, so to avoid sitting out all night with your cows take a long look at heat mount detectors, podometers, the Genus RMS programme, and, soon to be available, in-line progesterone measurement. It is a sound fact that it is easier to improve your heat detection than your conception rates so give yourselves and your cowman a chance and look for help.

Single thaw embryos

If, having vaccinated the cow, fed her well, accurately spotted her on heat every three weeks for the last ten cycles, what if she still won't get in calf?

You could dry her off, turn her out with the bull and check her before culling. Or just cull her now. Or you could consider using single thaw embryos.

Using a single thaw embryo is a way of bypassing the cow's need to get her egg fertilised to conceive because it has already been done for her.

The principle is that you serve the cow when she comes bulling and seven days later your vet implants an embryo under an epidural anaesthetic. So ultimately she conceives, sometimes surprisingly to the AI.

With cows potentially now worth more, can you afford not to try such techniques to avoid infertile cows?

Discuss this with your vet.