CLEVEDALE FARM NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2013

Summary of May's Heifer Rearing Meeting:

At the end of May we held a well attended meeting at Wilkes Farm, Lealholm, courtesy of Jonathan and Derek Hutchinson. We discussed the benefits and evidence for calving dairy heifers at 24 months and some of the areas which need concentrating on to achieve this. Although far from being a new concept, some famers either fail to achieve this target or else are unconvinced by the idea and this meeting aimed to present some recent work emphasising the benefits:

Age at calving (months)	Cost of rearing to calving (£)	Milk from calving to 30 months (litres)	Margin over all feed and quota (£)	Net cost to 30 months (£)
33	1503	0	0	1503
28	1227	4235	635	592
25	**1171**	**5920**	**888**	**283**
22	**1156**	**7200**	**1080**	**76**

- >50% of rearing costs are down to feed – the later heifers calve the more feeding they require, therefore the more expensive the rearing period is.
- **Although heifers calved younger will produce less milk in their first lactation, their average daily lifetime milk yield is significantly higher.**
- Calving at 23-25 months results in:
    - Improved fertility
    - Higher milk yield per day of life
    - Improved longevity
- Dairy calves with high growth rates between 12 and 65 days of age are more likely to survive to second lactation. The first two months of life are critical to future productivity.
- Aim for growth rates of 0.7kg/day MINIMUM from birth to service.
- **Good colostrum management is essential to achieve adequate growth rates and reduce disease risk – this can cheaply and easily be done by measuring colostrum quality using a "colostrometer" and checking the effectiveness of colostrum feeding by blood sampling calves <7days old**.
- Feed 2 litres of colostrum within the first 6 hours of life followed by a further 2 litres in the next 6 hours.
- If fed manually, feeding 6 litres of milk per day is optimum – either 2L three times a day or 3L twice daily. **Four litres of milk a day is not enough to achieve required growth.**
- Provide fresh water, poor quality forage (e.g. straw) and ad lib concentrates from birth.
- Consider grouping calves prior to weaning to increase intakes at weaning.
- Control calf disease e.g. scours and pneumonia to optimise calf health and growth.
- Calves which have required repeat treatments for pneumonia are also likely to be culled much earlier.
- Dairy heifers requiring >2 services are much more likely to leave the herd early.

Lameness Meeting Tuesday 27th August, 7pm

Briscoe farm, Hutton Mulgrave (courtesy Messrs Nicholson)

We have the opportunity to hear from a lameness specialist from New Zealand, Neil Chesterton. To escape the Kiwi winter, Neil is on a tour of the UK, courtesy of DairyCo, offering his thoughts on control of lameness in dairy cows. He has a particular interest in cow flow and management effects on lameness incidence as well as identifying risk areas around the farm. This will be an excellent opportunity to hear from someone with an interest in pastoral systems and discover his four key success factors for healthy feet. There will be food provided (perhaps even a BBQ if the good weather continues!) so please let us know if you would like to attend – this is an open invitation to any farmer who might be interested, not just "Clevedale clients", so please feel free to spread the word.

Milk fever

We are heading towards our busiest time of the year for milk fever after cows have spent the summer at grass – with the onset of lactation there is a sudden change in the balance between the lactational calcium demands of a cow and her ability to mobilise her own calcium reserves to meet this demand. Compared to the non-lactating cow, this demand can be as high as an extra 80grams per day.

So why is the end of the summer so risky? Well, there are numerous risk factors for milk fever which includes fat cows and exposure to too much calcium in the diet: there are two sources of calcium a cow can draw upon – from her diet and from her bones. Usually a cow will meet her body's demands for calcium from her diet; in the day or so before she calves a cow eats much less – this occurs just at the point at which calcium demands are increasing and as it takes approximately 24 hours for her body to "switch on" the mechanisms to get calcium from bones, the cow may become temporarily short of calcium and develop "milk fever". A summer spent at grass means cows' bodies become "lazy" with respect to calcium as there is lots of calcium in grass and they become reliant on calcium from the diet; at the same time body condition can be better than ideal and fat cows are more susceptible to milk fever as well as being more likely to have a difficult time at calving.

It is important to monitor cows close to calving for the signs of milk fever such as appearing cold, not progressing with calving as quickly as expected, not eating shortly after calving as well as an inability to get up - at this latter stage injectable calcium is required. Ensuring good magnesium levels (which helps calcium adsorption), using oral calcium boluses (eg "Bovikalc", "Calcitrace" et al) at the point of calving or using "transition" diets will all help reduce the risk of clinical milk fever. However, at a more basic level, being careful not to let cows get too fat by eating as much grass as they can eat in late pregnancy will go a long way to helping control milk fever - a disorder that impacts significantly on the health and production of cows.

On a final note, make sure you keep on top of fly control as we have seen a rapid increase in maggots causing problems in both cattle and sheep and Summer Mastitis in cattle – fly repellants may not get rid of ALL the flies but they will help reduce fly numbers.

CLEVEDALE VETERINARY PRACTICE
UPLEATHAM 01287 623802
STOKESLEY 01642 711298
WHITBY 01947 825042