

Veterinary involvement in herd fertility

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Dairy industry in last 10 years

- Increased milk yields
- Increased herd size
- Decreased labour costs
- Has resulted in higher culling rates (30% per year) – many cows culled before having chance to fulfil potential

Current trends in dairy industry

- Optimism over milk prices
- Feed costs rising
- Replacement costs rising (1.4 - 4 ppl)

Should aim to reduce culling rates for fertility, mastitis and lameness reasons

% of all culls leaving herd

- Infertility 24%
- Mastitis 19%
- Lameness 8%
- Other (including death) 24%
- Yield 9%
- Age 16%

Fertility

- Most herds would have optimal financial performance with calving index of 370 days and culling rate of 18% (7% for fertility)
- Average calving index currently 420 days with 30% culling (17% for fertility)
- Calving index can be artificially lowered by increasing the culling rate
- How can we improve on the average to be closer to the optimum ?

Causes of poor fertility

- Cows not cycling
- Poor or inaccurate heat detection
- Low conception rates due to disease, diet or husbandry

Routine visits may only provide a snapshot into the fertility performance of the farm

National averages

- Submission rate 55%
- Calving to 1st service interval 80 days
- Conception rate to 1st service 40%

Not surprising that average calving index
now 420 days

Heat detection

- National average submission rate 55%
- Usually the easiest (and cheapest) fertility parameter to improve
- 3 x 30 minute observation periods per day
- Length and intensity of signs affected by diet, building design etc
- Make sure everyone familiar with signs of heat and that detection is accurate (10% of cows AI'ed are not in season)
- Aim for submission rate of 70%

Poor conception rates can be due to ...

- Disease – whites, BVD, Lepto, IBR, Johnes etc
- Diet – Body condition score, fatty liver, protein/energy, trace elements
- Husbandry – lameness, bullying etc
- Cysts

Fertilization can occur after 90% of services

Routine fertility visits

- Weekly, fortnightly or monthly visit
- Post calving checks (30 days)
- Not seen bulling (50 days)
- Not served (60 days)
- PD's (30 – 42 days)
- Differences for herds running a bull
- Discuss submission rates, conception rates etc
- Reduced hourly rates for routine visit work

Take home message

Most herds are losing money due to extended calving index and high culling rates

There can be more to fertility control than “PD and go” approach

We are ideally positioned to interpret and monitor fertility data and interactions between disease, diet, husbandry and fertility