



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Farmers Newsletter - April 2007

Infertility – What's the cost?

Infertility in dairy and beef cattle is often quoted as being one of the biggest financial drains on the industry. Dick Esslemont from Reading University is recognised as the guru of calculating the cost of disease in the dairy industry.

He has calculated that, for every day the calving index is over 365 days, it costs the unit between £2 and £3 per cow. I know that these figures are disbelieved by many farmers. They refuse to recognise that their time should have a cost and often say that modern Holsteins just carry on milking so milk loss is not great when the lactation is extended.

I was recently asked to examine a 110 cow autumn calving herd which had a fertility problem in the winter of 05-06. Copper deficiency was identified as a possible cause of poor conceptions. Treatment was implemented quickly and fertility did improve.

One year on, and we can now look at the outcome of the problem.

When we compare twelve month rolling averages for November 06 to those of November 05, we can see a few trends.

First, lactation yields of about 8500 litres remained the same, therefore so much for infertility affecting yields you might say! But lactation length increased by twenty days, dry period length increased by a further ten days and so the calving index increased by thirty days from 420 to 450 days.

Milk yield per cow per year (i.e. the annual milk sold per head) dropped by 500 litres. If we say margin over concentrates was about 13 ppl, then the loss of income per year for the herd was over £7000 or £2.17 per day of increase in calving index. This figure does not include extra costs such as extra semen used etc.

This is a real life case on a local farm which I hope makes the figures more believable. If you have any concerns regarding your herd's fertility, please contact the surgery for our advice.

New Ultrasound Scanner Gives More Flexibility

We've just purchased a portable scanning machine. This machine just works exactly like our others but as it runs off batteries and is strapped to the vet's back, it gives greater options as to where a cow can be scanned.

The screen comes in the form of a pair of dark glasses which does make you look like someone from Star Trek. There is also a monitor which picks up the picture by radio signal so allowing students and farmers to see the image that the vet sees on his specks.

Although we've only had it ten days, we have been able to test it out in AI stalls, with cows who refuse to walk into the crush and the odd cow in the cubicles.

Ultrasound scanning enables us to identify pregnancies as early as 30 days old, find twins, age foetuses and identify those that are dying. It also allows us to look at the non pregnant animal in more detail and so allowing us to treat them more effectively.

If you don't already use us for scanning your cows, please contact us to discuss the advantages of getting us to do the job.



Mark visits Orkney

In early March, Mark was invited to a meeting on Orkney to discuss BVD and its control. Orkney consists of over 20 islands and has the highest density of cattle in Europe. There are 550 farms averaging 50 cows per unit. The majority are beef cattle but about a dozen dairy units supply the cheese factory on the island.

537 farmers have agreed to take part in a BVD control and eradication scheme and after two years, the majority are reaping the benefits. Their accounts show that they're selling more calves at heavier weights and increasing their margin per cow by £50. Farmers buying store cattle from the islands are willing to pay a premium because they are less likely to buy any poor doers. Farmers selling breeding stock are also seeing benefits.

Bulls sold at Perth go with certificates to say they are BVD free. One farmer sells Aberdeen Angus heifers to farms as far south as Dumfries and Northumberland and he reckoned he received a

premium of £300 per animal because his herd was BVD free.

If you would like to know more about the BVD eradication scheme in Orkney and take advantage of free blood and bulk milk testing, please contact Mark.



Which of the calves above is a BVD carrier? The answer is they all are. 10 calves in a 150 cow herd tested positive in a vaccine breakdown. All 10 are to be slaughtered ASAP.

Brucellosis Blood Test

As from 9th April, DEFRA is no longer running the biannual brucellosis blood test. This makes it all the more important to have any abortion tested for brucellosis. Remember it's a free visit by us onto your farm so we can do "while your here" jobs.

This Month: April



Remember the risk of staggers in cattle and sheep as the spring grass starts to grow.



Look out for scouring lambs and have us test the faeces for nematodirus and coccidiosis before guessing and having a 50:50 chance of getting the treatment wrong.