

Getting cows in calf needs excellent all round management



Genus ABS in association with British Dairying has launched the Pregnancies Drive Profits campaign to help improve dairy farm pregnancy rates. In this, the fifth article in the series, Genus ABS Business to Business Manager Paul Jandrell considers some of the factors that will influence pregnancy rates on farm.

If only getting cows in calf was just a matter of good heat detection! The truth is that while a conscientious and structured approach to detecting oestrus is a vital aspect of managing pregnancy production, your chances of getting cows back in calf is affected by many other management influences.

The way cows are managed will affect:

- ▶ How quickly and effectively they come into heat
- ▶ The chances of an embryo surviving after insemination.

At day eight post insemination 90% of cows will be pregnant and carrying a live embryo but only around 35% will calve down.

There are many factors that will affect pregnancy production on farm:

The cow – in addition to how well she is cycling, how she is grouped, her disease status, her condition score and how it is changing, how good she is on her feet will all affect her ability to get in calf.

The environment she is kept in – the quality of bedding, the type of surface she is kept on, and how long she is expected to stand every day will affect pregnancy production.

Nutrition – everything about feeding can have an impact on pregnancy production. Dry cow feeding is particularly crucial.

Management planning – management decisions such as the choice of Voluntary Waiting Periods and time from service to pregnancy diagnosis (DCCP) can have a huge effect on pregnancy production.

Farm labour – the ability of staff to spot bulling cows and to record the information and subsequently use the records correctly.

Semen – the way semen is handled, processed (thawed) and inseminated will all have an effect on pregnancy production.

The key point is that the vast majority of the factors influencing pregnancy production are within the farmers' control. Around 90% of the variance in pregnancy production on farm comes down to the cow, environment, nutritional and management factors.

In a normal herd it would be reasonable to expect a conception rate of around 55% and this will be our target. But this will be reduced by numerous management factors. Just consider two examples:

Lameness: anything that affects a cow's ability to stand comfortably will have an impact of heat expression and conception. Cows with a locomotion score of 3 or above at the time of service are less likely to conceive and research suggests conception rate in lame cows will drop by 25%, giving a likely conception rate of 30% compared to our target of 55%.

Nutritional factors: getting cows over the period of negative energy balance is a vital stage in getting cows ready to re-breed. Nutritional management of fresh calved cows must focus on minimising the number of times the diet is changed, ensuring the ration is well mixed and preventing clinical and sub-clinical acidosis. Sub-optimal nutrition management can reduce conception rates to as low as 22%.

It is possible to take management action to reduce many of these problems and so limit their effect on pregnancy production. For example, regular footbathing, adopting a structured programme of hoof trimming and routinely locomotion scoring the cows can help drive down lameness problems.

Management to boost pregnancy production must consider all the factors that will have an influence in determining whether a cow will be eligible for service while providing the conditions that increase the probability of embryos surviving. And the good news is that by addressing these problems you will increase production as well as the likelihood of getting cows back in calf. Given the current milk prices this will be a real bonus.

Do you want to improve pregnancy rate in your herd?

To help improve national pregnancy rates, Genus ABS has produced the Pregnancies Drive Profits self-help guide to allow you to understand ways to improve pregnancy production and profits on your farm.

Following a step by step approach the guide will let you and those involved in rebreeding cows understand the barriers to higher pregnancy rates, look at the factors affecting pregnancy production and then develop a meaningful action plan to improve performance.

To register for your free copy of the Pregnancies Drive Profits guide, just call Genus ABS on 0870 900 1270 or email cs@genusbreeding.co.uk



Lame cows have lower conception rates

pregnancies
drive profit