Meeting; Optimising Fresh Cow Performance - Wednesday 2nd November

The Bell Inn, Chittlehampton, 12:30 - 2:30 pm, Lunch provided.

Join us for an informal discussion of transition cow management and optimising fresh cow health and performance. We will discuss the importance of managing transition cows to minimise the risks of common post calving problems and maximise their performance. We will also look at how some of the products currently available can help reduce disease and improve performance, and breakdown the cost benefits with data from your farm and benchmark performance anonymously. The meeting has very kindly been sponsored by Elanco and lunch and refreshments will be provided.

If you would like to join us please call us at the surgery on 01769 572176

Skittles and Social

A great night was had by all at our Skittles and Social evening at The Bell Inn, Chittlehampton a couple of weeks ago. The atmosphere was great and I think it was safe to say that everyone enjoyed themselves.

Three teams of seven competed in the four round skittles tournament with a welcome break for refuelling after the second round. The final scores were close again this year with the front runners jostling for position through the rounds but the ultimate winners were the Team from Kings Nympton, with a score of 247. The title for the highest scoring lady was awarded to Tracy Ayre for the second year in a row with a score of 36 and the top scoring man was John Snell scoring 45. Well done to you all.

The turnout was great and we would like to say a big thank you to everyone that joined us and made the evening so enjoyable. Thanks you also to Lyn, Mark, Kieran and Matthew at The Bell for loaning us their skittle alley and their excellent service.

For more pictures from the night see our Facebook page.
The time has come for the autumn round of benchmarking for the Dairy Health Scheme customers. The Dairy Health Scheme is based around a routine herd health visit on a pre-planned basis with a designated member of the farm team to ensure continuity of service. The scheme is outlined in more detail on our website but basically it can include as much or as little as you would like and each farm would have a tailor made package to suit their farm and needs irrespective of herd size, yields or calving pattern.

The low milk prices we have seen over the last few months’ means we must all strive to produce our milk as cost effectively as possible in order for farms to remain viable. This puts even more emphasis on maintain good fertility and gaining bonuses where possible for cell count and quality.

The following graphs are based on a traffic light system where the red areas show if you are in an area which could be improved and the green area shows if you are performing well. We must remind everyone that every farm has different targets and we benchmark you all together but some of our benchmark clients may be more intensive than others – however, not all high input systems give high outputs which begs the question of where things may have gone awry.

### Fertility

This graph shows the % of cows which were PD’d back in calf by 100 days in milk. Nationally herd fertility has improved over the last few years and the average 100 DIC rate is now 39% so I am pleased to see that over half of our benchmarked clients are achieving above this level – targets should be to reach 50%. Fertility on farm is paramount to production and while there are cows who give a lot of milk over 18months or more, these cows tend to be the exception rather than the rule. Overall fertility can suffer from the effects of other diseases such as nutritional problems and lameness. If your fertility rates are low, it is important to establish why and this is where the dairy health scheme can really help.

### Milk Yield

Milk per cow per year is a reflection of not only the 305 day performance (i.e. type of cow) you have, but also the fertility of the herd. If a herd had a
305 day yield of 9500 but milk per cow per year of only 7500, we would question why this should be. The answer would undoubtedly be that there were too many stale cows not in calf and being milked on, so in 365 days insufficient cows are giving that fresh cow peak of milk. We must all bear in mind that not all our benchmark clients are on a high input, high output system so read the graph according to your herd targets. It has been a good summer for grass growth with some good forages in the clamp but the continued low milk price is holding production back at present. On the whole yields are down from this time last year and we are all striving to produce milk as cost effectively as possible.

**Cell Count**

National average cell count is around 151 but most people are targeting to maintain levels below 200. The ideal cell count from a herd health perspective is between 100 to 150, too low and you are at more risk of toxic mastitis and too high, there are cell count penalties on your milk contract and high risk of contagious bacteria in you herd.

**Culling and Death**

Culling and death rate is another area which should be maintained at 25% or below – again individual herds vary and un-mitigating circumstances such as TB breakdowns can skew these figures but you will know if this applies to your herd or not. Low culling rates don’t always translate to better productivity but there is a balance. If your culling rate is high and herd performance not good in terms of other KPIs, we need to look at the herd in general to ensure the high culling rate isn’t forced rather than voluntary. The current milk price means cows need to be maintaining higher production levels in order to remain profitable. For the average farms this is currently around 26L per day, although cost vary greatly between farms so it is worth finding out what your break even production level is when considering costings.

If you would like to discuss your herd performance or are interested in finding out more about the dairy herd health scheme, please speak to a member of the farm team.
Preparation your ewes for tupping

Good ewe nutrition is at the cornerstone of a successful tupping. Ewes on a good plane of nutrition are cycling at their maximal level and have increased ovulation rates. This means more eggs are available to be fertilised, leading to increased twinning rates. Maintaining good nutrition through early pregnancy ensures embryonic survival.

The target body condition score for lowland ewes at tupping is 3.5. In preparation for tupping, ewes should be separated according to body condition and fed accordingly. All ewes, even fat ones, should be on a good quality sward from 2 weeks prior to mating until the end of tupping. A sward height of at least 4-6 cm will be required. If grazing is restricted or of poor quality, a small amount of supplementary feed, up to 0.4kg concentrates/head/day or the use of a high energy feed block will help to make up the shortfall and may help to increase scanning percentages. Do not graze paddocks with high levels of clover in the sward at this time – clovers contain oestrogenic chemicals that can adversely affect the reproductive cycle.

A continued good plane of nutrition is required for a month after the rams have been removed to ensure successful embryonic implantation and prevent early embryonic losses.

Ensure that your ewes have received all their pretupping treatments – the abortion vaccines against Enzootic abortion and Toxoplasma need to be administered at least 1 month before the rams go in. Met Office data shows the north of our county has had an above average rainfall this summer, even though south Devon has been much drier, so again we are likely to be at high risk of liver fluke; migrating immature fluke can cause poor fertility and decreased scanning percentages. Ewes and rams should be treated pretupping with a product containing triclabendazole that kills immature fluke larvae.

For the majority of our flocks, a worming treatment will not be required for all the flock. A targeted treatment of just thin or scouring ewes is recommended. If you are not sure, drop in samples from 10 healthy ewes and we will carry out a pool worm egg count. Ewe lambs may not yet have developed full immunity, so they should be worm egg count checked as a separate group pretupping. The rams should all receive a worming treatment before working. Responsible use of wormers and targeting treatments only to those sheep that require it, help to decrease the speed at which wormer resistance will develop on your farm.
The use of *raddles* can aid management at lambing time, and helps to identify if tups are not working. Work from light colour to dark, and change colour every 16 days to identify repeat breeders. Colours can be changed more frequently if required to further aid nutritional management later in pregnancy. Remember to check harnesses daily, rams will not work if they are getting chafed. Harnesses will need to be altered throughout the tupping period as the rams lose weight.

**Tupping ewe lambs**

Ewe lambs should be at least 60% of their mature weight at tupping. E.g. 38-43kg for a mule at the start of flushing. Lambs that are autumn shorn before tupping have been shown to have increased performance with higher live weight lambs and better growth rates. Shelter MUST be provided if autumn shearing is carried out.

Adequate nutrition of ewe lambs is of vital importance, they may still be growing at 1kg/week on good grass in the autumn, as well as requiring energy for ovulation and the establishment of pregnancy. Ensure that ewe lambs have received all the vaccinations they require, including a primary course of Hettavac, in preparation for tupping. Larval fluke treatment will be required using triclabendazole, and worm a worm egg count should be checked prior to tupping too.

Ewe lambs do not actively seek out the tup in the way that ewes do. It is best to use an experienced ram (s) on ewe lambs and to tup them in a small paddock.