



Whilst we are all still waiting for summer to arrive (this seems to have become a recurring theme this year!), it's time to welcome you to our 3rd newsletter of 2015.

As most of you are now probably aware, Dr Phil Scott has hung up his stethoscope and ultrasound probe in June and is said to be enjoying retirement doing what he likes most - travelling and in his own words, "extreme" gardening in East Lothian. We are in the process of recruiting a colleague to fill his rather large boots and in the meantime continue to offer the Farm Animal Hospital services as we have done in the past. The hospital is an invaluable source for clinical development, teaching and research and so we are grateful for your ongoing support in submitting and donating cases. With teaching in full swing again we are always looking for new clinical case material and our reception staff and stockmen will be able to liaise with you on suitable pick up/drop off time and transport.

Reproductive tract scoring and pelvic area measurements of heifers

Routinely measuring growth rates, body condition scoring and assessing external conformation of replacement heifers is a well embedded part of herd health planning. However, internal assessment of the reproductive tract and pelvic dimensions for the animal's ability to breed and calve can also help with selection for breeding efficiency and genetic merit, and ultimately identify any problem animals early. Given that replacements in both the dairy and beef sector are often quoted as the 2nd biggest contributor to variable costs within a business, this is an important point to ponder.

Reproductive tract scoring (RTS) of heifers can be used as a screening test within herds to identify animals with poor breeding potential. Animals' reproductive tracts are examined per rectum and given a RTS score from 1 to 5. For example a score 1 animal has an immature tract and is less likely to conceive than a score 5 animal which is considered to be cycling and ready to breed. Correct timing of RTS (ideally 6-8 weeks before the start of the breeding season) can help allocate heifers appropriately to management groups such as non-breeders, or animals suitable for breeding immediately or in the near future.

Studies have shown that pelvic area measurements (PAM) in heifers prior to breeding are strongly correlated with PAM at calving (0.7) and so this can be a useful tool to help decrease the incidence of dystocia (difficult calving). Also, given that the heritability of this trait lies between 0.4- 0.6, after a few years of measurements and careful selection, the average PAM

of the herd can be increased. The most common cause of dystocia in cattle is foetal disproportion compared to pelvic area, hence appropriate bull selection in combination with selecting females for good pelvic area can help reduce the overall incidence of dystocia on farm. It should be noted though that selection for pelvic area is also likely to result in increased size of the entire skeleton. Increased skeletal size of the dam will be reflected in higher birth weight and dimensions of the calf which can in turn lead to dystocia. PAM is therefore certainly not the be all and end all of dystocia prevention in heifers. However, it can be successfully used as a selection tool to help identify abnormally small or abnormally shaped pelvises.



If you are interested in discussing replacement heifer selection further, please feel free to contact Martin or Izzy at the practice. Where possible, we aim to incorporate PAM and RTS as part of our beef health classes with students or alternatively can offer this service at the cost of a normal PD. If assessment saves one assisted calving per year, it easily pays for itself.

Women in Dairy initiative

“Women in Dairy” is a new initiative set up by Promar International and RABDF, supported by AHDB Dairy. It is designed to bring all women involved in the dairy sector together, for example: farmers, farm staff, partners of farmers, women working in the industry sector and farm vets. There are no age restrictions and they welcome women with varying degrees of association with the dairy sector. It aims to **connect** women to **share** knowledge and experiences to enable development of skills and confidence, and to **inspire** women in the dairy sector for the future of the UK dairy industry. They are doing this in three main ways:

Local Groups- there are regional groups set up across the country, where members get together for talks and discussions on chosen topics of interest.

Annual Conference- this year will be held on 9th September in Worcester

Membership- you do not need to be a member to be involved in local groups, but membership entitles you to newsletters and other benefits listed on the website.

For more info about Women in Dairy please view the webpage: <http://www.rabdf.co.uk/women-in-dairy/>

There are currently no regional groups in Scotland, though if anyone is interested in co-organising or attending one in the local area, then please contact Jenny via email: Jenny.Heap@ed.ac.uk or through the Farm Animal Practice reception on 0131 445 4468. Please provide your name and contact details and if we get sufficient interest then we will contact the organisers to see if we can get a local group set up.

Hypocalcaemia in freshly calved cows

Post-calving hypocalcaemia, also known as milk fever, is a risk in any cow that doesn't increase their food (and calcium) intake rapidly after calving, or who enters the peri-parturient period (around calving) in a poor state of nutrition. Although cases respond very quickly to intravenous infusion of calcium, this is only a short term fix. Relapse following apparent miraculous recovery is common and frustrating. The calcium that goes into the cows' vein fills the short term need, but actually leads to a depression in absorption of calcium from the diet. Cows must start to feed almost immediately and substantially on good quality food to prevent themselves going down again. We can help them out over this acute period by providing a source of oral calcium. We sometimes do this by pumping calcium-rich fluid into the rumen. This fluid also provides a source of energy and also yeast which is thought to stimulate appetite. It is also possible to give



calcium boluses over the throat, and these provide a longer term option in herds that are having an upsurge in cases. There is also a drench available. This is provided in a one dose bottle, which can be poured directly down the

cow's throat. This provides an easy source of calcium to protect the cow against relapse while she increases her feed intake. If you have cases of hypocalcaemia in your herd and would like to discuss prevention and treatment options, then please contact the practice.

Online payments

We now also have a facility to make online payments. A link to this can be found on the University of Edinburgh, Farm Animal Practice web page.

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/vet/services/farm-animal-services/farm-animal-practice/farm-animal-practice>

Also whilst you have your computer switched on, why not check out the Dick Vet Farm Animal Practice Facebook page and learn more about what our vets and students get up to?

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