



Maximising Calving Ease and Success
- July 22

As the busy calving season winds down, now seems a good time to think about how we can make improvements for next year.

Maximising calving ease should be a priority for any suckler herd as difficult calvings can be extremely costly. This is due to increased risk of cow/calf mortalities, subsequent fertility problems as well as costs associated with veterinary treatments.

It is impossible to completely avoid difficulties at calving as around 5% of calves will present in an abnormal position and normally require some assistance. However, there are many factors which we can influence to ensure calving goes as smoothly as possible.

Record Keeping

It is key to record which animals have problems around calving and which ones needed assistance. By keeping records we can link problems at calving to factors such as sire selection, body condition and individual characteristics such as pelvic size and age.

Good records can influence decision making for next year's breeding season:

- Dams which have had previous difficulties should be considered for culling (especially if she has concurrent issues)
- Reconsider sire selection if several difficult calvings are attributed to one bull
- Heifer pelvic scoring and pre breeding checks are useful for herds with lots of difficulties calving heifers
- If problems are associated with body condition, nutrition must be carefully managed to ensure correct BCS at calving

Bull Selection

This plays a massive role in how big the calf will be at calving as well as how easily female offspring will calve in the future.

Estimated breeding values (EBVs) are a way to measure and compare the genetic potential of sires and allow us to assess and compare the breeding merit for specific traits.

Selecting bulls with known EBVs for heifers is particularly beneficial as they pose the highest risk for having calving difficulties.

Some key EBVs to target for calving ease are:

- Calf birthweight (kg)
- Calving ease %
- Gestation length (days)
- Calving ease of daughters %

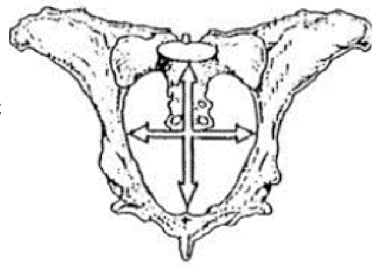
Pelvic Scoring Heifers



This is a very useful tool to decide which heifers to breed from and increase calving ease.

The best time to score heifers is around 12-13 months of age in order to make breeding decisions early on.

The weight of the animal is recorded as well as a horizontal and vertical measurements of the pelvic to predict the calf birthweight heifers are able to safely deliver.



This information can then be used to select bulls which suit the predicted birthweights. Using AI on heifers is very useful as EBV's on stock bulls are not always available.

Nutrition and Body Condition

Calving cows and heifers down at a body condition score of around 2.5-3 is key when striving for an easy calving herd.

Fat cows are at greater risk of calving issues as they tend to have larger calves and more fat deposits inside the pelvis which makes the birth canal narrower. Aim to reduce the condition of fat cows during mid pregnancy and have them at a BCS of 2.5 roughly six weeks pre-calving. Changes in BCS around mating can negatively impact fertility, whilst changes during late pregnancy can lead to metabolic problems and poor colostrum production.

To maximise calving success of heifers aim for 65% of mature weight at service rising to 85% by the start of their second breeding season. Achieve this via steady growth rates during the rearing phase to avoid over conditioned heifers. It is well worth regularly weighing heifers to ensure they are consistently gaining around 1kg/day pre-weaning and 0.7-0.8kg/day after weaning in order to meet desired bodyweights.



2.5



3



3.5



Assisted Calvings

We recommend intervention if there is no progress within 30 minutes during stage two of labour when the calf is being expelled.

Before intervention ensure the following:

- Proper restraint to minimise risk of injury to dam/calf/people
- Clean PPE/equipment to reduce risk of disease transmission.
- Bucket of warm water to maintain hygiene
- Lots of lubrication to ease the process and avoid damaging dam/calf



Seek veterinary attention if the calf cannot be delivered easily after intervention.

As always, please get in touch if you would like any further advice.

Wishing you all the best,



Zoe.

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