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**Newsletter February 2015**

**MONITORING NUTRITION IN YOUR HERD**  
**Pete O'Malley**

In the last two newsletters I discussed the benefits of monitoring nutrition during the routine visit including fertility, faecal scoring, and fresh cow ketone testing. There are also valuable monitoring techniques outside of the routine visit including the 3 “S”s – Scoring, Sampling, and Statistics:

**Scoring - BCS**

Having already covered faecal scoring, this month I'll discuss body condition scoring (BCS). The process of BCS is straight forward but does require consistency in order to be useful. We can provide guidance and advice on this.

Stage of lactation	Target BCS
At calving	2.5 - 3.0
60 days post-calving	2.0 - 2.5
100 days before drying off	2.5 - 3.0
At drying off	2.5 - 3.0

This table provides good target BCS but it is important to remember that the change in body condition over time is almost more important than the absolute value. The degree of condition score loss during early lactation has a large impact on subclinical ketosis and therefore cow health and production. The diet should aim to minimise excessive BCS loss in early lactation, correct BCS during late lactation, and maintain a stable BCS throughout the dry period. The more regularly and reliably scoring is performed, the sooner dietary adjustments can be made to avoid overly fat or overly thin cows, and the problems associated with this.

**Sampling – Silage**

Successful diet formulation requires not only monitoring of the cow's performance but also equally close monitoring of the ration. The composition of silage is extremely variable both between clamps/cuts but also within clamps. It is important to sample as often as possible, which of course varies based on how fast you progress through a clamp, but monthly sampling is a good starting point. It is also important to sample correctly, which is a service we provide using our silage corer - call the office for more details. The benefits of formulating a ration based on accurate silage analysis rather than guesswork far outweigh the cost and hassle of regular sampling.

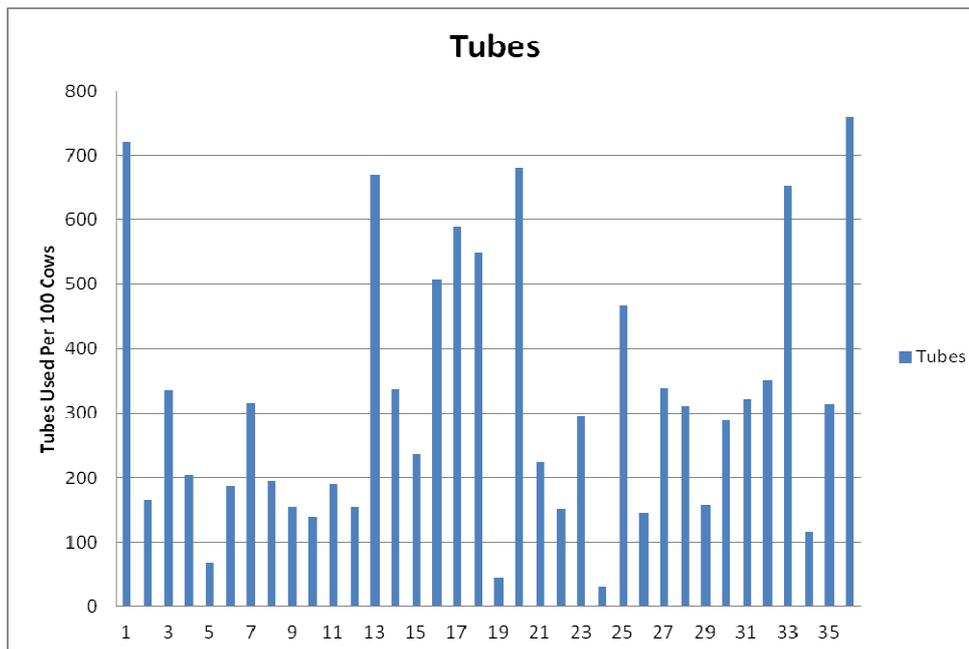
**Sampling – Bloods**

Blood sampling can measure a whole range of metabolites in the cow but with respect to nutrition it principally looks at a few measurements to take account of energy, protein, and sometimes mineral status of the animal. It has a place in nutrition monitoring but is a more expensive monitoring tool so should only be considered once the other more cost effective methods of monitoring have been undertaken. For more details, speak to one of our vets.

## Mastitis in 2015.....Eoghan McAlonan

This month we had a very successful dairy farmers meeting where James Breen discussed Mastitis. James is a recognized specialist in cattle health and productivity and he offered a summary of the latest research into mastitis and “best-practice”. He also emphasised how successfully the **Dairy Co. Mastitis Control Plan** is working on UK farms. Farms that have implemented the plan have seen mastitis levels fall by 30% on average.

Following on from the meeting we have compared tube usage on a **random selection** of some of our dairy farms who carry out regular fertility visits with us. **The results are being treated in strictest confidence**; see the graph below which shows tube usage per 100 cows per year on these farms. If you are interested in finding out if your farm is represented on the graph contact me. **I will be the only person with access to the results.**



Heavy tube usage per 100 cows *may* indicate high levels of Mastitis. However please bear in mind that different farms use different numbers of tubes per case of mastitis, so more tubes may not necessarily mean more cases of mastitis. By dividing the number of tubes used per hundred cows (as on the graph), by the number of tubes you use on an average case you will have a figure which represents your **Mastitis Rate**; i.e cases of mastitis per 100 cows per year. National averages are approximately 60 cases per 100 cows and target is approximately 40 or less.

The aim is to give us a broad idea of where your farm is in relation to similar farms in the area. Obviously management systems will have a huge bearing on results, e.g. well maintained sand beds would be expected to out perform straw yards.

If you are interested in finding out if your farm is represented on the graph contact me at the office. Maybe you should consider giving the **Dairy Co. Mastitis Plan** a go on your farm???

The **Dairy Co. Mastitis Control Plan** involves a questionnaire and farm visits as well as full mastitis data analysis. Pete and I carry out these plans. It currently costs £695 + Vat but the first 3 plans completed by FarmVets in 2015 will only be charged at £495 + Vat (**first come first served**).