

FarmVets

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Newsletter January 2015

MONITORING NUTRITION IN YOUR HERD

Pete O'Malley

Last month I discussed the benefits of fertility monitoring as a measure of nutritional status in your herd. Following on from this, I'll now focus on the second two F's: Faeces and Fresh Cow testing.

Faeces

Faecal shape and consistency can give us a good guide as to consistency of the diet in your herd. The dung pat is simply the result of the undigested part of the diet and therefore reflects both the type and quality of the diet itself, but also the ability of the cow to digest it.



The dung is scored from 1 to 5 with 3 being the target. Dung score should be as consistent as possible throughout the herd. Very high or low scores, and inconsistency of dung throughout the herd suggests there is a potential problem with the diet, e.g. subacute ruminal acidosis (SARA). Seeing this should prompt further investigation. Part of this investigation can include **faecal sieving** to assess two aspects of the dung. The first being fibre length, which should be less than 0.5cm and appear as a uniform matt of hair like fibre strands. The second involves looking for undigested grain. The presence of whole grains in the dung suggests either inappropriate grain processing, insufficient cudging, or inadequate gut transit time.

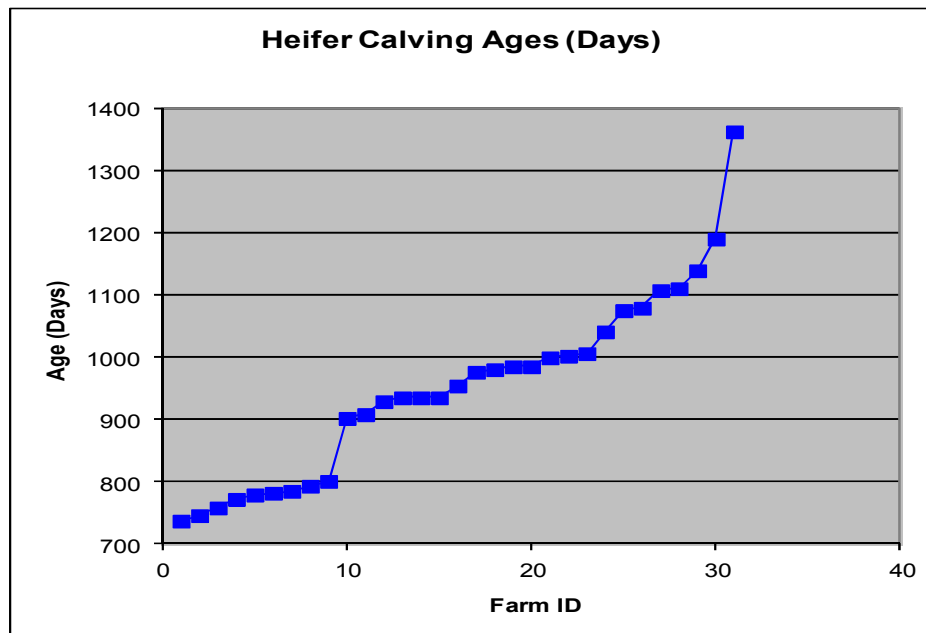
Fresh Cow Testing

This is a valuable and affordable cow side test which uses a drop of blood to instantly detect ketones in the cow's blood. This provides a measure of subclinical ketosis and is therefore a good monitor of negative energy balance in your early lactation cows. This test will pick up on problems before clinical signs become apparent which means you can act sooner to adjust the diet. This will help reduce the costs of poor performance but also reduce the treatment costs associated with subclinical or clinical ketosis, including DAs.

Why Calve at 24 months?

1. More milk: (a) Over entire life time
(b) Milk/day of life
2. Lower heifer rearing costs
3. Less youngstock on the farm:
(a) Housing costs
(b) Disease susceptibility
4. Easier Calving

See below the spread of days at first calving of 30 FarmVets herds taken from NMR milk recording/herd companion. Each blue square represents a farm - you can ring and we can tell you if you are one of these farms. Unless you are calving at 24 months or close to it, perhaps you might want to organise some veterinary input on your heifer rearing. The cost:benefit ratio could be substantial.



New TB Cross Compliance Testing Controls

From 1st January 2015 the APHA will extend their existing cross compliance approach to late TB tests to include **all** types of Defra TB tests (except tracers) with deductions made to farm subsidy payments for farms who fail to complete their tests by prescribed deadlines (the change applies to all cattle keepers who claim CAP Scheme payments).

We therefore strongly advise that you call us well in advance to book your test to avoid any financial penalties. Please be aware that the test must be **completed** (not just started) within the notified testing window.



The relief of a clear TB test at Manor Farm, Merriott