

# Sheep & Beef Talk

October 2019



## Preparing the Beef Herd for Successful Mating

When preparing for mating season, it is very easy for a late cycle calving pattern of a herd to spread. It's good to have a checklist to ensure this doesn't happen.

### Cows in BCS 3 and well fed:

- Well fed cows will cycle sooner after calving so are more likely to be in-calf at scanning (see Table 1).
- Cows in body condition score 3/5 at calving have a greater chance, with adequate feeding, to be in condition score 3 at mating than lighter conditioned cows.
- 1 kgDM of good quality ryegrass/clover pasture is about 6kg of wet pasture. 6kg of wet pasture will fill up one 20L drench drum. So the cows getting fed 20

kgDM/day were eating the equivalent of 20 drench drums full of pasture every day.

### Heifers Well Grown:

If you are mating heifers at 15 months target a minimum of 60% of their mature weight e.g. 270 kg for 450 kg mature weight, 330 kg for 550 kg mature weight. Lighter heifers may take the bull but will be smaller at calving time meaning more assisted calving's next spring.

### Bull BVD Management:

Bulls must be free of BVD virus. Most bulls are now

## IN THIS ISSUE

- Preparing the Beef Herd for Successful Mating
- Toxovax Reminder

## Reminders for October

- Return docking order forms to your local clinic.
- Have metabolic bags (magnesium and calcium) on hand for cows.
- FEC check for pre-lamb capsules.
- Herd trace element testing pre-mating including magnesium.
- 1st BVD for heifers 8 weeks pre-mating, booster 4 weeks pre-mating.
- BVD Booster and fertility testing for bulls pre-mating.
- Ram palpations and dog vaccination runs will be coming soon.
- New regulations for sheep and cattle welfare are now in place, such as, local anaesthetic to be given before disbudding or dehorning is done.

Table 1. Effect of feeding level on scanning rate. Adapted from Nicoll 1979.

Feeding level after calving	8 kgDM/cow/day	20 kgDM/cow/day
Scanning result (in-calf %)	78%	100%

Continued on the next page...

## Preparing the Beef Herd for Successful Mating (continued)

tested and vaccinated before leaving the stud, but never assume this. Bulls only need to be tested for BVD once in their life, but should be vaccinated yearly, ideally three months before mating.

### **Bull Soundness:**

Bull soundness examinations cover two aspects. Firstly, palpation and measurement of the testes to make sure there should be enough high quality sperm for mating. Secondly, the serving ability test to find problems with bulls that are not obvious. Around 20% of the bulls we check fail the test. A high percentage of older bulls in particular have either problems with the penis (especially corkscrew) or arthritis that isn't noticeable until they start mating.

### **BVD for Cows and Heifers:**

Research by Massey in 2017 showed that around 40% of herds across the country had a BVD PI present in their replacement heifers.

The research also showed that PI cattle aren't that good at providing "natural vaccination" with less than half of R3 heifers having immunity by the start of mating on some farms.

These heifers are at risk of infection during mating which can cause abortions or the birth of more PI calves. Maiden heifers should be given a sensitiser vaccination eight weeks before mating and a booster four weeks before mating. Mixed age cows then need a booster four weeks pre-mating. On many farms the booster timing is difficult in cows and is often done pre-calving or at calf marking. If you cannot get the timing right with the cows it may compromise the performance of the vaccine, especially if PI cattle are in the herd.

### **Copper Status:**

Copper levels are likely to be at their lowest in late winter/early spring. On deficient properties, a

copper management plan is important. If you do not have a plan in place, we can biopsy cows now to check where your herd copper level is sitting and make a plan to ensure it's right for mating.

### **Selenium Status:**

Selenium is required to help early pregnancies establish. If you are unsure about selenium levels in your herd a blood test will tell us if treatment is required before mating.

### **Drench (including fluke):**

Well fed MA beef cows are unlikely to need a drench for roundworms. Heifers & poor conditioned cows may need a targeted treatment. In liver fluke areas, a combination fluke specific drench may be required.

At VetEnt we can help you tick off the checklist and make sure mating for 2019 is successful so speak to one of our vets today.



## Have you ordered your Toxovax yet?

A single Toxovax vaccination provides lifelong protection against the disease, toxoplasmosis, which is one of the most common causes of contagious abortion in sheep.

An important point to remember is that Toxovax is a live vaccine that has a very short shelf life (10 days from manufacture). It is important that you order your vaccine four weeks in advance of when you need it, as it is made to order, and we commit to manufacturing batch quantities four weeks in advance with the supplier.

Place your orders for 2019 by filling out [this form](#).

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