

Sheep & Beef Talk

May 2020



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Reminders for May

- Do a winter feed budget to get an idea of what feed you might have by lambing time.
- Exit drench for lambs – Zolvix Plus or Startect.
- Check copper levels in cattle or supplement if you already know your copper status.
- Blaze is our recommended product if looking to treat lice only. For young cattle, a combination drench injection such as Boss or Eclipse E should take care of lice as well as worms.
- 5in1 vaccine for beef weaners.
- Lepto vaccinations for cattle.

Don't forget animal health treatments for stags when they come out of the hinds.

Knockout drench lambs with novel active.



Ensure ewes are gaining weight over mating.

Book in cow scanning to help manage winter feed.



What Can Affect Beef Cow Scanning Results?

To figure out which factors are affecting your herd requires some information gathering that will allow your vet to help you develop a plan.

A higher than expected dry (or empty) rate at scanning time means that one or a combination of three things has happened:

- the cows were not cycling during mating
- the cows were cycling but did not get pregnant
- the cows were pregnant but aborted before scanning time

The same things can happen to sheep and deer but the main causes differ.

To figure out which factors are affecting your herd requires some information gathering. Remember that a negative result rules a factor out and is as valuable as identifying the cause.

The main reasons for a cow not cycling at mating time relate to mating weight/condition score and the amount of time since she last calved. Cows under feed pressure will continue to feed the calf at foot before they start cycling. A New Zealand study by Nicoll (1979) compared the effect of feeding levels after calving. The scanning results are shown in the table. (See Table 1.)

1 kgDM of good quality

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

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

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.

The target condition score at mating is 3 (1 – 5 scale) and cows need to maintain or gain weight during mating to achieve high pregnancy rates. Mating weight is critical for first mated heifers. Target weights for heifer mating at 15 months are 270kg for Angus and Hereford type cattle. That means an average weight gain of half a kilogram per day from birth. Continental breeds can take a month longer to reach puberty and need to be 30kg heavier as a rule of thumb.

Do you have weight and/or condition score records for your herd? These can identify issues related to calving condition score and feeding levels leading up to mating.

Out of 365 days in a year, a mixed age cow is pregnant for roughly 282 days, and generally doesn't cycle for 55 to 70 days after calving,

leaving at best only 28 days to get in calf within one year. That means the bull has to get the job done first time, otherwise she will calve later next season or not at all. The length of time taken to start cycling again is longer in heifers, in cattle under feed pressure, and when calving date is earlier (see Figure 1. below).

If the cows were cycling but not mated it points to an issue with the bulls (or AI procedure). The issues may be obvious (e.g. lameness, broken penis) or subtle (e.g. corkscrew penis, hip and back injuries). The photo below, Figure 2, is a close up of a bull examined with a broken penis which happened at the end of the first cycle. The bull was replaced but the mob was left with only 1 bull for about a week. The effect was a 14% dry rate after 3 cycles of mating for the mob.

We have also seen poor results with single sire mating, especially when virgin rising 2 year old

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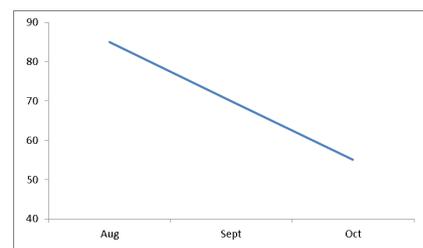


Figure 1. Above - The Effect of Calving Date on Number of days taken to Cycle (adapted from Profitable Farming of Beef Cows, Morris and Smeaton, 2009)

What Can Affect Beef Cow Scanning Results? (continued)

bulls are single sire mated to heifers. A fitness for service examination can be performed by your vet if the empty rate is higher than expected. It is recommended to check the bulls annually at least 2 months prior to mating.

There are many possible causes of cows aborting before scanning time (failed conception). The more common among these are weight loss during mating, BVD, selenium deficiency, copper deficiency and facial eczema or liver fluke (in affected areas). Neospora

and Leptospirosis tend to cause losses after scanning, but can show up before scanning. To find out if any of these are issues, blood samples from the heifers will show recent exposure to BVD and liver fluke and if facial eczema has been an issue or not. Liver biopsies from either cull empty cows (if they represent the herd) or from pregnant cows will indicate trace element levels.

With some information gathering at the time of scanning, your vet can help you develop a plan to either sort out any issues

that are identified, or to gather further information (such as condition score at calving and mating) in the next season to dig deeper into the problem. Ageing of pregnancies at scanning time adds more information by identifying which cycle the cows got pregnant (or not), and can help with feed budgeting for the spring.



Figure 2. Bull's broken penis

Nitrate Poisoning

As the days begin to get colder, nitrate poisoning is something we need to keep in the forefront of our minds. Nitrate poisoning can cause sudden death in cattle, sheep, and deer. It can be easily avoided by staying vigilant to the risk factors, testing high risk forages (ryegrass, oats and brassicas), and managing the feeding of these accordingly.

Risk factors for increased nitrates in forage:

- Fertilised heavily with nitrogen
- Young, immature forage crops
- Heavily applied effluent onto pasture
- Cold, wet, or cloudy

weather conditions

Testing high risk forages is done using a sample of the leaf, stem, and tuber and will determine whether or not there are safe or unsafe levels of nitrates in the pasture. The test is performed at the clinic and can be done within the hour.

Nitrate levels change constantly, especially based on weather conditions. A pasture that was safe yesterday may no longer be safe. It is important that if there have been wet, cloudy conditions that the pasture is tested before letting stock on.

Other management factors that can help reduce the risk of nitrate poisoning include feeding supplement

prior to feeding high risk forages, restricting grazing during danger periods such as straight after cold, foggy weather and checking stock regularly on high risk forages (clinical signs are usually evident within the first 4 hours).

If you suspect you have issues with nitrate poisoning in your stock (they are weak and stumbling on a break, or some have died suddenly) call us immediately, this is an EMERGENCY and will be treated accordingly. Then gently move them off the dangerous forage and we will treat any that cannot be moved off the forage with the antidote intravenously.

Alexandra
p: 03 440 2277

Mosgiel
p: 03 489 4770

Aspiring
p: 03 443 7262

Cromwell
p: 03 445 1229

Queenstown
p: 03 442 9977

Ranfurly
p: 03 444 9615