

# Outwintering of cattle is not a welfare issue

VET Andy Adler of Synergy Farm Health, said he had no health and welfare issues with the idea of outwintering suckler and store cattle.

Despite the public often showing concern about the practice, Mr Adler, speaking during one of the seminars, said outwintering cattle was no more a welfare issue than housing cattle.

"While the key issue is whether the cattle are too cold or wet, in reality most, on a still, dry day, can deal with temperatures down as low as -13degC and are quite happy with temperatures down to -5degC."

Mr Adler said there were a 'number of health problems' to consider, which were often caused by acidosis, such as insufficient dry matter intakes and trace elements issues, but said these were easy to rectify.

"Solutions to health problems include providing shelter and dry land for cattle to lie on and



**Andy Adler**

allowing sufficient time for them to adjust to the new feed."

He said the trick was to keep cattle growing at a slow rate during outwintering to ensure they would catch up later and make up for the winter period through compensatory growth.

"Fluke and clostridia can be a problem, as can lameness, but these can be dealt with through a vaccination programme and good stockmanship."

## The cost of outwintering

JOHN Hoskins, a farmer from Dorset, has modified his own outwintering system over the last 25 years.

He outwinters 250 cattle from 15-months-old upwards on stubble turnips and says the cost per head for a 150-day outwintering period is £85, which includes crop establishment costs and additional forage and labour.

He said: "I wanted to increase numbers and with building space limited the

easiest way to do this was outwinter the cattle."

While the cost saving was a big advantage, Mr Hoskins said it helped the farm deal with NVZ regulations and, in addition, animal health problems were minimal, even in extreme temperatures.

"When they go onto grass for the finishing period, they motor on through compensatory growth and we aim to finish them within 60 days of them going on to grass."