

# Importance of correct dry cow management

Whether you are running a small family dairy or an 80-point rotary parlour, dry cow management can be the root of many issues in the herd.

Peter Siviter, a vet with Synergy Farm Health, says it is important to get on top of mastitis in early lactation to slow the increase in metabolic disease and reduce the number of retained cleansings.

Mr Siviter says: "No matter how much milk she has given today, the cow you dry off needs more careful attention than anything else in the parlour. She may not be physically inspected again for another two months."

He adds it is important to address lameness issues before drying off and be scrupulously clean when inserting dry cow tubes.

He says: "Dry cow therapy is a hot topic at the moment and with antibiotic restrictions on the horizon, we may well see the organic sector leading the way."

"Selective combination therapy is becoming the norm on many farms, with all cows receiving a teat sealant, but only those with udder health issues during lactation being treated with antibiotics in combination with sealant."

"Discuss with your vet the most effective therapy for your farm and remember to follow the protocol."

Mr Siviter says when putting a cow into the dry group, take the time to appreciate cleanliness, moisture underfoot, stocking density and ventilation, as these factors can often be easily improved but may have disastrous consequences if unchecked.

"Ignore at your peril leaky gutters, blocked drains and broken ballcocks as plumbing faults lead to damp, dirty bedding which is a playground for bacteria. This can greatly increase the chance of

cows going down with toxic mastitis or metritis after calving."

He adds far-off dry cows, although supporting a seven to eight-month-old foetus, are on holiday compared to the athletic requirements of peak lactation.

"The key is plenty of long fibre and low energy intake. Even if it is not feasible to score every week, train yourself to notice unwanted fluctuations in body condition - over-fat animals are destined for difficult calvings, retained cleansings, left displaced abomasums and ketosis."

Dry cows should be incorporated into a regular footbathing regime which can be an easy way to reduce digital dermatitis infections and prevent foot problems developing in peak lactation.

## Energy

Mr Siviter says: "In the weeks prior to calving, milk production has already begun and energy requirement starts to increase."

"Not all farms will be able to support a separate ration for the close-up dries. But easing the transition to milking diet has unquestionable benefits in terms of metabolic disease, rumen health, and as a way of encouraging dry matter intake up to the point of calving."

"It is a good idea to spot 'at risk' cows at calving down. Your vet can discuss the best way to tackle problems specific to your farm and set up some standard operating procedures."

"In general terms, I advise farmers to treat with a fresh cow drench for fat dams, a calcium bolus for very high yielders and an anti-inflammatory injection after a difficult calving to prevent problems, keep dry matter intake high and kick-start a strong lactation."

"However, every farm is different, so it is important to seek advice from your local vet."

## Calving down

While a disinfected calving box for every dam would be ideal, it is not always possible in reality. However, the basic requirements can be applied to any system:

- **Cleanliness:** Poor hygiene predisposes to mastitis and metritis and can be a death sentence for a weak calf
- **Space:** Both for the safety

of the calf and to reduce stress in the dam, the calving area must not be overstocked.

- **Ease of calf management:** The calf must be easily visible and accessible so the navel can be dipped and the first feed of colostrum provided. This is particularly essential if you are snatch-calving to prevent transmission of Johne's disease



Peter Siviter of Synergy Farm Health highlights calving down tips.

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PETER SIVITER

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