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Ways to boost next year's income from spring-calving herd

▶▶ Maximise weight of weaned calves

▶▶ Reduce number of herd 'passengers'

AS the ground starts to become less saturated, many beef producers are looking to turn out their cows. However for some, the ground still remains too wet and they are still having to deal with the costs associated with housing.

Rob Goss, a vet with Synergy Farm Health, says increasing the income from beef cows becomes even more important when faced with these current difficulties and he adds spring-calving herds need to boost their income from weaned calves.

"Maximising the weight of weaned calves and the number of calves per cow served will boost a pay cheque. This can be done by targeting fertility, dry cow nutrition and disease.

Weaning weight

"There can be a significant variation in the weight of calves which are weaned on a fixed date if their birth dates vary dramatically. Calving a greater number of cows earlier on in the calving season will mean heavier calves at weaning. A good target to aim for is 65 per cent of cows calving in the first three weeks of the calving block."

Mr Goss also says ensuring high milk production by the cow early on will mean calves hit early growth rates. "Initial colostrum intake starts this off and it is then important to match food availability to appetite to ensure maximum milk production. This ensures calves can receive the most amount of milk possible in the early stage of development when growth rates are most efficient.

"One of the advantages of having 65 per cent of cows calving together means you can budget

your grass or other forage effectively, delivering appropriate nutrition to cows to deliver higher milk volumes to the calves."

Mr Goss says beef producers should also aim to achieve 95 calves from every 100 cows put to the bull.

"Any cows in the herd which do not rear a calf each year could be considered passengers which drive down profitability. Good cow and bull fertility are necessary to reduce the number of passengers in the herd."

Bull fertility

Mr Goss says body condition score, nutrition during the dry period and bull fertility will all have an impact on this.

"A bull's fertility and ability to serve cows can vary from previous breeding seasons. Up to a third of bulls are considered sub-fertile. Young bulls and old bulls are at greatest risk of having problems and thus bulls should be tested to avoid any expensive shocks.

"Often when testing several bulls from a farm, one or more of the bulls will not be as fertile and other bulls will be compensating for their poorer reproductive performance. As a general rule, a fertile bull can serve 60 normal cycling, disease free females within nine weeks, and get 90 per cent in-calf."

Mr Goss also reminds producers about the affect disease will have on fertility. "One disease which can result in early embryonic death, abortions and poorer calf health is bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD).

"Tacking blood from a group of unvaccinated young stock over six months old is the easiest way to determine whether there is BVD circulating. Implementing a vaccination protocol or culling the animals which are persistently infected is cost-effective and will enhance cow fertility and calf health."



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Feeding during the dry period

- Changes in feeding during the dry period can affect fertility
- If forage becomes tight for spring-calving cows still indoors, it is likely there will be a negative knock on effect on their fertility because changes in feeding during the dry period affect egg development and subsequent egg quality at first service
- At this stage it is important

to monitor body condition score and take appropriate decisions about what to feed the cows

- If you see cows losing weight in the last three weeks before calving, then increasing feeding space or feeding concentrate should be considered. Talk to your vet or nutritional adviser about the best way this can be achieved