

Feed, fertility, feet and flies were the focus of discussion at an 'elite dairy workshop' organised by NWF Agriculture and held last week at Marsh House Farm in Farndon, Cheshire. **Katie Lomas** reports.

Use a variety of heat detection methods to achieve best results

Summer months affect automated aids

DAIRY producers were reminded of the importance of using several heat detection aids to achieve the best success rates when it comes to spotting signs of heat.

Bill May, from the Lambert, Leonard and May vet practice, advised using a combination of methods, even if an automated heat detection system was in use.

"It is important you don't stop using your eyes to visually spot signs of heat and I would also advise using heat detection aids such as tail paints and crayons alongside automation as nothing is 100 per cent reliable."

Automated systems

Mr May said automated systems could sometimes be less reliable in the summer months when cows were more active anyway, as distances needing to be walked to grazing areas could vary on a day-to-day basis.

"Heat detection has to be consistent so that is why I would advise using automation alongside visual heat detection aids. The more methods you use the more reliable heat detection gets."



Bill May says it is important to look for visual signs of heat.

He said using a vasectomised bull for spotting heats was 'much more sensitive' than any machine, but said despite being vasectomised it would still need to be treated in the same way as any other bull.

"If you do have the facilities, then it's worth considering as it's a very good way of heat detection."

"I'd start using a vasectomised bull at about 12 months of age, and then you'd probably be able to use it for six to nine months before it got too big. To keep a constant supply of these bulls you'd need to be vasectomising two a year."

Mr May advised producers to

look at the time intervals between first and second services to gauge how good heat detection is on farm.

"If cows are getting two services, most should be returning for their second service about 21 days after the first service."

He said if more than 10 per cent of cows are returning for a second service at zero to 18 days then heats were not being spotted correctly.

"If you have a lot of cows falling into this bracket then, someone might be identifying bullings when they are not actually bulling."

Embryonic deaths

Mr May said if more than 10 per cent were returning for second service at between 26 and 37 days, then it might be the case the cows were experiencing early embryonic deaths, which should be investigated further.

Mr May said on most dairy units it was usually heat detection which could be improved, rather than conception rates.

"Dairy farmers tend to get focused on conception rates, but these are difficult to improve if heat detection is not good enough."



Using more methods boosts heat detection reliability, says Bill May.

Ways to cut incidence of lameness

THE biggest gains in reducing lameness can be made through making sure correct trimming protocols are in place.

Clayton Barber, from NWF, said ideally feet should be trimmed during the dry period and again at 100 days after calving for heifers.

"It's important to get the right protocols in place. This way you will see them two times a year instead of once, when all you can do is fire-fight the problems."

Rachel Lander, a technical specialist with NWF, said feeding minerals, particularly biotin and zinc, could help harden feet.

"However, these are not quick fixes as it will take at least six months before you see the effect, because this is how long it takes for the new hoof being produced at the top of the foot to reach the bottom of the foot where it is in contact with the floor."

She said mineral supplementation is often reduced or overlooked in summer when cows are out grazing.

Kill fly larvae to control the problem

WITH increased temperatures comes the annoyance factor of flies, but traditional methods of fly control are only tackling about 15 per cent of the potential fly population.

This was according to Dan Humphries, a vet with Lambert, Leonard and May, who said for every adult fly there is at least eight more waiting in the wings to replace it.

"We can only actually see the tip of the iceberg when it comes to flies as we are only seeing one-in-eight. We are not seeing the larvae, so when flies start to emerge on farms, we are already behind the curve."

Deterrents

He said pour-on products, insecticides and fly tapes all had a part to play in killing and deterring flies.

"While pour-on products don't act as a deterrent, there is also the possibility of using products such as Stockholm tar or citronella, which can often get overlooked but still have their uses, particularly in heifers."

"Environmental controls such as fly tapes or insecticides can



Dan Humphries

also be used, but it is important to rotate insecticide products as flies are good at picking up resistance."

However, Mr Humphries added these types of controls only tackled the 15 per cent of

flies which were visible and would not tackle the future fly populations held in the larvae.

He explained the controlled release of fly parasites could be used to tackle this problem with the larvae.

These fly parasites can be bought in the form of bags of parasitised larvae, which has been approved by Defra.

Mr Humphries said: "The parasitised fly pupae hatch out and will reproduce before seeking out existing fly larvae, which they kill and then lay their own eggs." These pupae can be manually broadcast over areas where there are a lot of flies present.

"It's better to use this method early on to stop the larvae hatching out in the first place," said Mr Humphries.

Dealing with the fly threat

- Two types of flies - biting and non-biting
- Apart from the hassle factor, flies have been associated with weight gains
- Pour-on products require the fly to bite the treated animal and then the fly will die
- Pour-ons will not kill non-biting flies

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