

Key areas for attention at turnout

Turnout is a critical time of the year for farmers, with livestock facing heightened environmental challenges and nutritional and breeding pressures. **Rhian Price** speaks to vets across the country to find out what farmers should be doing to ensure cattle are in tip-top condition this spring

Checklist

Vaccinate for endemic disease ✓

1 Make sure your vaccination programmes are up to date. Leptospirosis is most likely to spread when urine pH changes at early grazing, so it is imperative to vaccinate prior to turnout.

Heifers should also be vaccinated against bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) pre-service to protect the fetus against infection. BVD passes through the placenta to infect unborn calves and can cause abortion and deformity.

When a cow is infected with the disease for the first time during the first half of pregnancy the calf can become persistently infected, which increases the chances of it spreading in the herd.

Vaccinate against lungworm ✓

2 All calves eight weeks or older and adult cows should be vaccinated for lungworm. They need two doses three weeks apart, with the second one given a week prior to turnout, so make sure you plan well ahead.

Body condition score your cattle ✓

3 Body condition score (BCS) should be the starting point of any health checklist this year. Many cows may be under condition as a result of poor-quality forage made last summer. When cows are underweight they will generally need to be on a rising plain of nutrition to get them back into shape. And don't forget your bull. They should have a BCS of 3-3.5 at the start of the breeding season. Meanwhile cows need to be at the correct condition score six weeks prior to bulling to ensure they are cycling properly. Blood tests might also be needed to test for trace element deficiencies. Speak to your vet or nutritionist for tailored advice.



Conduct a fertility check ✓

4 It is estimated that 20% of bulls are sub-fertile, which is a huge cost to any herd. Often older bulls can succumb to sub-fertility and a previous good breeding season doesn't guarantee the next. Young bulls may also be sub-fertile as their size may not reflect reproductive maturity. So conducting a bull and cow MoT 10 weeks before the breeding season starts is key to avoid issues at turnout. Book a visit by your vet so they can make sure your bull and the cows are in tip-top condition to maximise conception. Key to this is carrying out tests to evaluate semen quality and testicular palpation, as well as making sure females' reproductive tracts are clean and they're cycling regularly with no uterine infections.

Treat for fluke ✓

5 Test for fluke eggs and treat cows before turnout if all stages of fluke haven't been killed. This will prevent spring pastures becoming contaminated [see p43 for more information].

Trim overgrown feet and treat lameness ✓

6 Ideally a bull should impregnate 60% of females within the first three weeks. Many farmers overlook lameness, but it can contribute to lower conception rates by making bulls reluctant to move and service cows. As a stress-related issue it also dampens oestrus and reduces cows' ability to conceive.

Information provided by Bruce Richards, Paragon vets; Matt Coulston, Frame, Swift and Partners; and Steve Borsberry, of 608 Vets.

For a guide on how to body condition score cattle visit www.fwi.co.uk/howtoideos