



www.willowsvetgroup.co.uk

01606 723200

Getting transition cow management right a fundamental part of maintaining dairy cow health. Darrell Irwen BVSc MRCVS, partner at Willows Veterinary Group, Northwich, Cheshire, looks at how to assess dry cow management.

Cows which maintain a good dry matter intake up to calving have higher dry matter intakes immediately post calving and reach their maximum dry matter intake sooner; this in turn results in better fertility and higher milk yields. To put it very simply; the key to successful transition cow management is to minimize the extent of reduced feed intake pre calving and encourage a quick increase in appetite post calving.

There are several measures and indicators which have value in assessing transition management and a combination of indicators is always more reliable than just looking at one thing in isolation.

Typical things to record and measure are:

- Incidence of fresh cow metabolic diseases such as milk fever, retained fetal membranes (RFM), ketosis, left displaced abomasum (LDA), endometritis and mastitis <30 days in milk (DIM)
- Conception rates in 21-day blocks of DIM at insemination
- Levels of clinical and subclinical ketosis in fresh cows by blood or milk ketosis testing
- Milk yield and quality in the first 60 days of the lactation in particular milk proteins
- Cull rate in the first 30 days post calving

Most of you already record and have access to most of this data for one purpose or another; you just need to set targets with your vet to monitor. That's all very well but how do you achieve good transition with your cows in your shed?

Feed availability is crucial! As a rule of thumb there should be 30" of feed barrier space per cow in the transition group, this enables cows to feed freely with less fear of dominant animals coming to bully them out.

Feed should always be within easy reach of the feed barrier to the extent that when feed is pushed up or new feed is put out no more than 20% of the group should come forward. Aim to add new cows only once or twice a week to reduce the social conflict which occurs when cows are establishing the pecking order in a new group.

Avoid overcrowding: aim for 10 m² per cow on straw yards this enables cows to move around freely and come and go to the feed area confidently. Look at things from a cow appetite perspective and see what you could do to encourage feed intakes.