

New year is a good time to consider a new plan

JANUARY marks the start of a new year and is a good time to consider a fresh approach to animal care.

What is herd health planning?

Herd health planning is an opportunity to review and assess past performance within the herd to not only highlight areas where problems occurred and take measures to improve the situation, but also to monitor management practices that are in place and have worked and decide if these can be safely scaled back to free up time or money to make changes elsewhere.

Who should be involved in these discussions?

At a bare minimum, the farmer and the vet, but really all parties with an interest in the farm, so that everyone involved knows what changes are to be made and why. This can include many

HERD HEALTH

Alistair Couper, of Capontree Vets, Brampton, says now's the time to take a look at herd health planning

people such as the nutritionist, stockman, book keeper/accountant etc.

How often should herd health planning occur?

Herd health planning is an on-going and continually-evolving process that needs to adapt to the constantly changing farm environment. No two years are the same, which has been highlighted very well by the past two years.

In 2012, we had a terribly wet summer with cattle housed early and facing a long winter on generally poor rations, which were also in short supply.

It was a long hard winter for many cattle and that caused a lot of problems.

Last summer, on the other

hand, was excellent. The cattle stayed out longer and were in much better condition to face the winter with far superior feed stocks available. All that said, some of the health issues from 2012 remain.

Is there a difference between herd health planning and a herd health plan?

Sadly, in many circumstances, yes there is.

What do you mean?

A herd health plan should be produced as a result of the reviews and discussions mentioned above, with the driving force being to improve herd health, productivity and welfare. It must be tailored to individual farm needs.

Unfortunately, the driving force for many herd health plans is to meet the requirements of a farm quality assurance scheme or soil association directive and has very little to do with herd health at an individual farm level.

It then very often becomes a tick box exercise to meet the scheme demands with the provision of a well-ordered document that is filed away and has the dust knocked off it when produced with pride to pass the quality assurance inspection.

How can we avoid this?

We have to avoid falling into the trap of seeing the herd health plan as a necessary evil and take the time and effort to formulate a robust and practical plan to take the herd forward and seize the opportunity provided.

So are you in favour of herd health planning?

Yes, very much so. It just needs the right approach.



ADVICE: Alistair Couper, of Capontree Vets