



THE  
WOOD  
VETERINARY  
GROUP

FARM NEWSLETTER  
JUNE 2015  
BEST FOOT FORWARD

### Milking Grass for Profit Farm Walk

Tamsin and Phillipa were pleased to attend the RABDF, Dairy Co. and BGS April farm walk at Mile Bridge Dairy Unit as the farms veterinary representatives on behalf of Wood Vet Group. The meeting was kindly hosted by Lydney Park Estates and there was a brilliant turnout from all over the South West. Keith Davies, Gavin Green and their esteemed team gave the many farmers that attended a detailed insight into the once a day milking, New Zealand style grazing system. The day gave a thorough guide to how the dairy moved from an intensive indoor, three times a day milking predominantly Holstein genetics herd of 450 cows to a grazing herd milking 850 Jersey cross Friesian cows once a day over 1300 acres over several years of modification.

The driver for this move was to increase profit margins and this prompted many questions in light of the current situation facing the dairy industry. In order to adjust to the new management system quite drastic investments had to be made to the herd and farm. There had to be improvements to the existing cow tracks infrastructure and several kilometres of new tracks were laid. The herd genetics underwent a natural adjustment by retaining only suitable Holsteins from the old herd and the introduction of Jersey cross Friesian cows with a 500kg average body weight. Membership and contribution to a once a day grazing discussion group was also vital to the way the farm transitioned and is currently managed. The

herd is split and milked in two separate herds and each is managed well by Pawel and Tim who also take on responsibility for monitoring the grazing block. The herd averages around 4000 litres at 4.7% fat and 3.7% protein and supplies Wkye farms in Somerset. The herd has reduced its input costs through adopting this system as well as through the increased fertility seen in the spring block calving system, reduced mastitis cases and lameness and so despite the lower yields there is still profit to be made.

Keith and Gavin both highlighted that the success of this system is due to a team effort driven by the enthusiasm and commitment of their entire team. Careful budgeting,

planning the grazing block and grass growing strategies, in particular the use, timing and cost of nitrogen, are an intrinsic part of the daily routine at Mile Bridge as after all growing grass is the mainstay of this business.

For those of you interested in grazing systems please see the invite below to the launch of a brand new progressive discussion group, The Dairy Think Tank which is kicking off with a farm walk around a seasonally grazing herd in Winchcombe.



### Do Lamé Cows Go Thin or Do Thin Cows Go Lamé?

This is a rather chicken or egg question and so read on with an open mind. The UK target for lameness is under 10% but sadly it is all too commonly 35% in herds across the country (Barker 2010). The majority of this lameness is attributed to Sole ulcers, Sole haemorrhages and White Line Disease. We have long known the

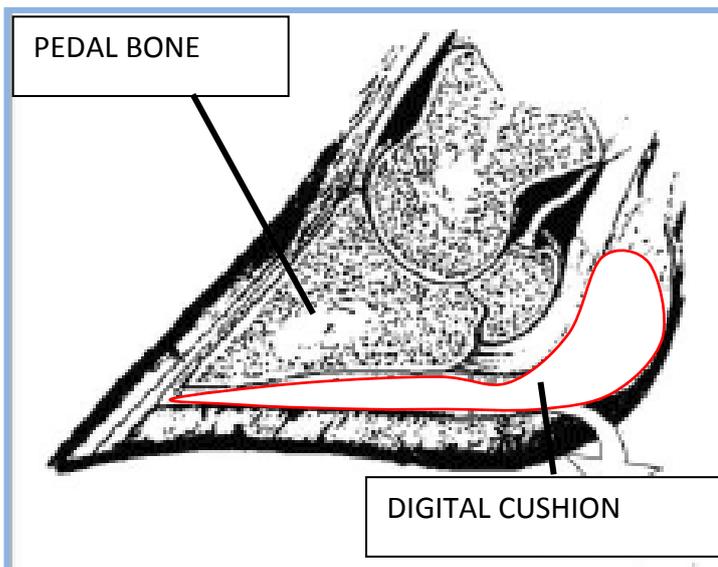
effect of calving hormones, housing and comfort, foot shape and high yield on the amount of lameness we see but until this latest trial we didn't truly understand the effect of Body Condition Score (BCS). Trials in 2008 showed that BCS loss or low BCS is linked to higher lameness rates – but why?

### Lame Cows Go Thin

Many of you will have experience of lame cows wasting due to the obvious issues that come with lameness such as extended lying times and reluctance to stand and feed ultimately dropping dry matter intake. There is also an element of stress and pain response.

### Thin Cows Go Lame

The Digital cushion is a pad made up of fat and connective tissue that sits below the pedal bone and above the corium which creates the new sole growth. This cushion acts as a protective pad and shock absorber stopping damage to the corium.



Several large studies measuring digital cushion thickness found that:

- Thin cows (BCS <2.5) have thin digital cushions (<1cm)
- Cows of BCS 2.5 and above have thicker digital cushions

- Cows with a thin digital cushion (<1cm) are TWICE as likely to go lame than cows of BCS 3 and above
- 3-4 months into lactation the digital cushion and the cow are at their thinnest (when we see more lameness)
- Cows calving at BCS 3.5 and above lose more condition over calving and early lactation and fall into the same high lameness risk category as thin cows
- High yield and High protein yield strongly links to lameness through effect on BCS

What we can take away from this information is that we need to monitor BCS more often and do more to manage cows that fall outside our targets. We cannot look at BCS only from a lameness prevention point of view as it has so many effects elsewhere including early lactation ketosis, LDA's and yield performance. Therefore we have to look for compromises in BCS by keeping high yields but reducing weight loss and therefore lameness.

Plan:

- Genetic selection against lame cows
- Adjust farm conditions to handle higher yielding cows and protect feet
- Monitor BCS routinely in dry cows and fresh calvers to accurately influence BCS through rations and grouping
- Target for
  - o BCS 2.75 – 3 at calving
  - o BCS 2.5 at absolute minimum 60 days in milk
  - o BCS 2.75 – 3 Dry period

Speak to us about BCS and mobility scoring to identify farm targets.

### Abortions

All cattle abortions need to be reported to your nearest AHPA office immediately who then decide whether to test the animal for Brucellosis. We ask that you report abortions direct to AHPA.

They will ask for:

- CPH number
- Full UK eartag number
- Age of animal
- Date of abortion
- Whether the animal is contributing to a bulk milk tank (milk collected by milk buyers/processors is routinely tested by them four times a year for Brucellosis surveillance – please be aware of this)

If your CPH begins 14 ring: **01392 266 373**

If your CPH begins 17 ring: **01162 787 451**

AHPA will then contact us at the practice to authorise the test

### Meetings

#### The Dairy Think Tank Discussion Group Inaugural meeting and Farm Walk

Wed 17<sup>th</sup> June 11am – 2pm

Langley Hill Farm (GL54 4AA)

Please email [thedairythinktank@gmail.com](mailto:thedairythinktank@gmail.com)

or ring us on 01452 543 999 to book your place