



Sun and Flies

In the extremely hot weather recently, most livestock have been exhibiting stress behaviours from crowding under trees, drinking more and reduced DMI but added to the sweltering weather and the worry about silage regrowth without some rain is the mass hatch of nuisance flies.

On livestock farms, there is a copious breeding environment in muck heaps, slurry lagoons and stagnant water for flies including face, horn, head, stable and horse flies. All of these species of fly then irritate, bite and carry infection around our livestock. Unfortunately, cases of summer mastitis in heifers, new forest eye in calves and cows as well as misdiagnosed bulling activity from false positives from tail paint or scratch cards from constant tail wishing are all extremely costly. Due to the constant irritation and associated diseases, nuisance flies can quickly become a welfare issue on farms.



The best way to reduce the costly impact of flies from associated diseases and reduced production is to manage the environment to reduce the amount of flies around and to use repellents where possible to deter flies away from cattle. Fans in sheds will keep good air flow rates and fine spray of water in collecting yards and parlours often help to deter flies and reduce crowding in already warm sheds.

When selecting a product to apply to cows and calves, ensure it covers all the fly types of concern on your farm and that it has an achievable application frequency. Fly Ear Tags can also be useful if you have wooded areas or significant New Forest Eye problems. We increasing hear reports of fly products not being as effective or lasting as long as stated and whilst resistance is developing amongst fly populations it is also vital to follow application guides very closely including the area of application on animals, dose and timing. It is also worth avoiding jobs such as castrates and dehorns in high risk times for fly strike.

Managing the fly breeding environment is also important to reduce the overall challenge to allow repellent treatments to work effectively. You will have seen our flier about Clover friendly flies reducing the fly population on farms. We are very excited to be using these two native species of parasitic wasp (they don't sting) that target all of the nuisance fly larvae whilst not harming pollinating species. They lay their eggs inside nuisance fly pupae and feed on the contents. This dramatically reduces the amount of flies hatching in a completely sustainable, natural way that is also compatible for organic standards. As the wasps do not bother cows or people, farms can continue to use hanging fly tapes and cow based repellent products whilst the wasps get established. Speak to us to learn more about the helpful wasps. To get a handle on fly control this summer speak to us about your product choice and ordering and adding in Clover flies to your farm protocol. Don't forget our Vet Tech service includes fly product application, dehorning or vaccinating any animals ahead of summer turnout and Clover fly farm treatments.



Beef Pre-Breed Decisions

As stock bulls are at work again this season we are always on alert for poor results on scanning sessions either from a bull under performing or a whole herd issue. Recent studies in the UK show that 20-30% of fertility tested bulls are sub-fertile. As beef suckler units measure production success based on kilos of beef weaned per number of cows put to the bull it is vital that both the cows and bulls are performing at peak levels. Any inflammatory processes e.g. lameness or a fever can damage sperm leading to a sub-fertile bull which won't necessarily be detected until cows are presented for PD. Therefore, establishing breeding soundness prior to the season will ensure the greatest chance of success.

A fully fertile bull run with 40-50 cows should achieve an average pregnancy rate to each service of 60%. This would result in 94% of cows being pregnant in a 9 week block. A sub-fertile bull that is achieving only a 40% pregnancy rate to each service, would result in only 78% of cows being pregnant in 9 weeks. In the face of low numbers of pregnancies the financial implications of either an extended calving block from swapping in a fertile bull or having fewer calves born can be crippling to any suckler unit.

We recommend having all bulls tested, 6-10 weeks prior to the start of the service period every year. This allows time for bulls to be treated/recover from any issues and re-tested as the whole cycle of sperm production can take up to 60 days or worst case scenario for any replacements bulls to be sourced and quarantined. Younger, new and older bulls are especially high risk for performance issues so should be prioritised for checking.

A breeding soundness exam includes checking:

- Feet, legs and locomotion (fundamental for service)
- Body condition score (aim for 3 - 3.5)
- Health treatments are up to date (vaccinations, blood samples for new purchases/accreditation, parasite control)
- Internal and external sexual organs (including testicle size/consistency)
- Semen quality (volume, density, motility and abnormalities)

Buying a new bull is a big investment and he needs to stay fit and fertile for at least 6 years to be cost effective, pass on the genetic traits he was picked for and produce healthy, viable calves. Therefore, we need to make sure we always look after our bulls to get the best return. A breeding soundness exam will help identify issues early on as well as using information such as EBVs to select for desirable traits. Early PD sessions are also invaluable to highlight issues early on while some salvage procedures can be implemented.



Heifer pelvic measurement

Don't forget that maiden heifers can be assessed for breeding soundness as well as the bull.

In an effort to reduce the likelihood of difficult calvings, caesarians and poor fertility next season in heifers, increasing the culling rate of young animals, our best approach is to avoid excessive calf birth weight but also select for adequate pelvic area in potential breeding heifers. Low birth weights/calving ease can be selected through bull EBVs as well as managing heifers rations carefully in late pregnancy to avoid large calves. Insufficient pelvic area is strongly linked to increased issues and can be measured using the RICE pelvimeter and then compared to known accepted values for continental and native breeds. Heifers can be measured at 13 months old, prior to their first breeding season at the same time as checking for abnormalities in reproductive organs and assessing target weight for bulling (65% of adult body weight). Heifers that do not meet requirements can then be removed from breeding groups and fattened or sold for killing. Over time homebred heifer performance will improve as pelvic area is a highly heritable trait.