



nantwich farm vets



March 2020

Dates for your diary

Wed 11th Mar **Rearing for Returns – Module 3**
10:30am – 12:30pm Pre-weaning Nutrition

Tues 24th Mar **FINAL BVD Stamp It Out follow-up meeting.**
11:30am-1pm See back page for details

Wed 15th Apr **Rearing for Returns – Module 4**
10:30am – 12:30pm The Calf Environment

As I write this, it's with great sadness that I am finishing my last day at Nantwich Farm Vets. As many of you know, a couple of months ago I made an extremely difficult decision to leave a job that I love in order to take on another challenge I felt I had to give a go. I've had an extremely happy six and a half years at NFV.



I'm very grateful to have worked with the best colleagues and I strongly believe there isn't a better team of farm vets anywhere else in the country. I'm leaving with some fantastic memories, experiences and in particular my routine clients, some great friends. I will miss working with you all, but I look forward to seeing you around. I wish you all the very best in the future. It's been a pleasure!

Mike

Medicines Matters

We have been reviewing how we dispense medicines over the counter to clients that walk into the practice. All medicine orders require approval from a vet, so we would encourage people to ring ahead to avoid the need to wait while our team get your order ready for you.

Going forward individual syringes of medicines can only be dispensed from a vet's van and we will no longer be keeping any open bottles of medicines in the practice. Therefore, the availability of individual doses will depend on having a vet available in the practice to draw up the medicine from their van stock, so again, we would advise ringing ahead to avoid having to wait.

We would like to remind people that we cannot accept the return of fridge drugs such as vaccines. Please only order the number of doses you require as over orders cannot be returned. Our vet techs are available to help you calculate the required doses and to help with the administration of vaccines.

Please check all medicine deliveries as soon as possible and before opening the product packaging. Please notify us within 24hrs of delivery if you believe there has been a mistake with your order.



Before I go...

Michael Wilkinson imparts some valuable lessons from his experience at NFV for the past six and a half years.



For the last 6 years I've been lucky enough to work with some of the best vets, best farmers and best herds in the UK. I've also travelled to North America several times meeting nutritionists and consultants whilst visiting some exceptional herds. Instead of focusing on a particular subject for my last newsletter I thought I would share what I feel I have learned from my experiences. Things that I see working well and I feel are important to cow welfare and production. I understand there are limits to changes businesses can make financially and how difficult this industry can be, but I'm hoping some of you may take away a couple of things to think about that might possibly help your business in the future.

I'm of the strong opinion that cattle on the most successful and profitable farms are happier. They are more content in the shed, relaxed around new people or inquisitive to new things and it's due to better nutrition, comfort or lack of disease. And this is **TOTALLY** independent of system (grazing or housed, milked 2x or 3x or herd size.) I've made a list of some of the main things I personally would concentrate on to try and make my herd happier, healthier and thus more profitable. I've also become very keen on making the whole process of managing and milking dairy cows as simple as it can be. I feel the larger the farm the more they realise the importance of this.

If we upset a cow's routine, put her in pain or make her feel ill, she will, without fail, give less milk. Therefore,

to make a cow give more milk just keep things consistent, make sure she is healthy and comfortable and she will always pay you back.

Remove calves from the calving yard

The first few hours are the most important of a cow's life. Unfortunately, despite what vegans might like everyone to believe, almost every disease that poses a threat to a calf in her first few weeks can be picked up from their mother. So totally for the calf's benefit, remove them from the calving yard, away from all the bacteria and viruses as quickly as possible. This simply minimises her chances of picking something up and suffering an episode of disease in those first few weeks which massively impacts future growth and production.

Feed 3-4 litres of clean colostrum ASAP

I know it's been said endless times but honestly, just make sure your calves are getting at least 3 litres (4L for big calves) of colostrum as soon as you can after birth and calf rearing will definitely be easier. There is no difference between letting the calf suck a bottle or tubing so if tubing is easier and you're pushed for time just tube it.



I've seen huge differences on large units simply by using more straw for bedding in calf sheds. Coats can be great but I don't think they're necessary if we feed enough milk. Fresh air is vital but we must provide lots of bedding for dryness and warmth. And as simple as it sounds, if you bed down once per day, do it later in the day. It'll be deeper at night when it's colder and when they spend more time sleeping in it. Also, if you're feeding calves straw, chop it and they'll eat more starter.

Calve heifers by 24 months

For the efficiency and profit of any dairy, age at first calving is huge. A couple of my clients will read this and disagree -we have argued about it before! But I really can't see any of the advantages of calving over 24 months outweighing the benefits of calving less than 24 months, in terms of profitability. Yes, they may give less milk in the first lactation but they are much more likely to go back in calf again sooner, make it to their second and third lactation and give more lifetime milk. However, I personally wouldn't go too young and they **must** be big enough at AI. Plenty of heifers do fine calving at 21 months but I think many can be too immature and can struggle to achieve target peak yields. My target **average** would be 23 months.

Keep cows comfortable

For me, cow comfort is so important, much too often overlooked and massively linked to any dairy's profitability. I've seen time and time

again 'poorer genetic' animals or herds out-perform those with generations of excellent genetics simply because the cows are happier and more comfortable. One of the biggest factors of economic loss on any dairy is cows not making later lactations because they age sooner than they should – as a result of our management. Cows don't start paying back their rearing costs until half-way through the second lactation and cows that have a third, fourth or fifth lactation are extremely profitable. Too many cows don't make these lactations because we age them too fast and this makes them more susceptible to infertility, lameness and mastitis etc.

To minimise this, do the absolute basics as best you can. Allow cows to eat when they want, drink when they want and lie down when they want and I really think it's that simple.

Cows don't start paying back their rearing costs until half-way through the second lactation

Minimise time in the collecting yard

Time away from the shed is often a significant part of the cow's time budget, but there are no benefits to the cow in standing in a collecting yard. Reducing standing time is one of the big advantages of robots (not that I'm telling anyone to buy or not to buy robots). If you're milking 2x try to get every cow in the group back to the shed within 1 hour, if 3x within 45 mins. If necessary, split groups or bring out half a shed at a time, and if you do I'd be certain lameness will decrease, cows will look better and milk will increase.

Make footbathing a routine and trim lame cows sooner

There is still a big difference in levels of lameness between farms. In the last few years I've seen some farms massively decrease the number of lame cows and these points have



become so obvious and important to those that have. Clients with far from 'ideal' sheds are consistently achieving mobility scores with less than 5% score 2's and 3's.

- having any digital dermatitis in youngstock will mean we will always be *pushing water up-hill* trying to improve lameness in the milking herd. Footbath them as often as it takes (2-3 times per week) until you don't see it. The same goes with dry cows.
- make footbathing the milking herd as routine as milking is. Do it every day of the week with low concentrations of chemical rather than footbathing for a couple of days when you see more digi than usual. Some herds footbath twice per day and a few even three times.
- focus on new cases of lameness and lift feet as soon as they go lame. It massively improves cure rates and prevents cows from going chronic.
- do at least two routine trims per year, at pre-dry off and around 80 days in milk.

Make cows lie down!

Yes, sand is best but not everyone can use it. There are excellent mattresses out there now for £100/stall if you know the right ones to buy. I've seen herds absolutely transform and sell a lot more milk by installing new mattresses, knocking down walls to improve lunging and altering stalls to make cows lie down quicker and for longer. Again, use more bedding. Cows **always** lie down faster in a better or freshly

bedded stall. I know sawdust is expensive but so is having cows stand in cubicles. More lameness, less milk production and ageing cows too quickly.

Have a routine fertility visit

Fresh cows give more milk and herds **always** sell more when average days in milk is lower. I personally think every single all year-round calving herd should have at least a fortnightly fertility visit and herds over 200 cows weekly. The protocol should be a herd protocol that is consistent and ensures cows are inseminated quickly after the voluntary waiting period, and found and re-inseminated quickly if not pregnant.



Keep rations consistent

Forage quality is king. I've made some great relationships with nutritionists and they're vital to help feed cows better. Make diet changes when needed but don't rush into them. Way too often I've seen diets changed because we've had two milk fevers in a week, a couple of DAs in a month or we'd like another litre. Cows (rumens) like it boring and cows perform best when diets have been consistent. Often we have just had a couple of wet days, dry matters have altered or the problem is already fixed but we go and make a change. And most importantly, before we do make any changes, look at the cow, look at the muck and look at how the cows are performing. If your nutritionist goes solely by forage analysis and their computer and doesn't walk the cows before any

changes, find a new one (oops, I've said it)!

The dry cow ration is the most important ration on the farm. Do everything you can to ensure dry cow intakes are as high as possible with the energy density of their diet being right. Look at peak yields (around 6 weeks calved) instead of average milk per cow per day to make diet changes. If transition isn't right and cows aren't peaking, no amount of changes to the milking ration will significantly increase average milk per cow per day. It's very difficult to increase cows'



yields in mid to late lactation. Focus on those that are still to calve and the fresh group to increase total yields and make sure the diet allows these cows to peak high but stay healthy. Then when it's good, keep it consistent.

Once the basics are right, make the most of genetics

Finally, genetics is and always will be huge. I've seen cows on clients' farms doing 20,000kgs in 305 days. There will be herds averaging 15,000kgs in 10 years time, I am absolutely certain. Use the best semen available for what should breed your perfect cow. But to allow any cow to fulfil this genetic potential, we must do the basics right and make her as happy as possible.

Courses & Meetings

BVD STAMP IT OUT – FINAL FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Tues 24th March, 11:30am-1pm @ Nantwich Farm Vets, Hurleston

This free meeting is open to anyone who has not attended a cluster follow-up meeting yet, and anyone who would just like to find out more about BVD, its impact and control. A hot lunch will be provided. Please message Laura or contact the office to book your place.



REARING FOR RETURNS – BITE-SIZED LEARNING

The uptake for our bite-size calf health training series, Rearing for Returns, has been very exciting, spaces are filling fast but it's not too late to book on! These two-hour sessions are for anyone on farm who is responsible for the day to day care of calves, and provide a great basis for training staff in calf-rearing best practices.

£35 per session, discounts available for booking on all remaining sessions.

11th March – Module 3 – Pre-weaning nutrition

This session will include some basic calf anatomy and its impact on how we feed the calf in its first few weeks – balancing hay, concentrate and milk replacer feeding. It will also cover some other essentials of calf feeding including hygiene and consistency.

April – Module 4 – The calf environment

May – Module 5 – The coughing calf

June – Module 6 – The scouring calf

August – Module 7 - Growth rate monitoring

September – Module 8 - Weaning to bulling

October – Module 9 – Heifer fertility



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