

nantwich farm vets



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24hr phone line: 01270 610349



November 2018

Dates for your diary

**8th Nov
7:45pm**

Cheshire Grassland Society
#fakemoos - The truth behind the US dairy industry
Nial O'Boyle (previously of NFV) speaking @ Reaseheath College.

**13th & 27th
November**

BVD Stamp It Out Meetings
See back page for details

**10-13th
December**

Dairyland Foot-trimming Course
Contact Steve Crowe to book a place – only two left!

Welcome to autumn! The weather has most definitely taken a turn over the last week...

It's fair to say a lot of you have been trying to make the most of the grass that's been out there after a hard summer – it's not often many cows are out all the way to the end of October! Recently we've seen some herds with dietary and metabolic issues more common in spring with the return of some fairly lush, low fibre grass. But some of you have also seen the effects of lower energy in the grass on recent fertility. Keeping them out on pasture too long may have impacts further down the line.

Read on as Michael reflects on his trip to some dairy farms in the USA, plus some helpful reminders about the importance of colostrum from a suckler perspective.



Well done to Michael who recently passed his Diploma in Bovine Reproduction in September. Being five years qualified he has become the youngest ever DBR holder- but he assures us he won't be doing any more exams in the future! He'd like to send his thanks to all his clients who helped with any projects and for their understanding when he had to rearrange routines and have time off.

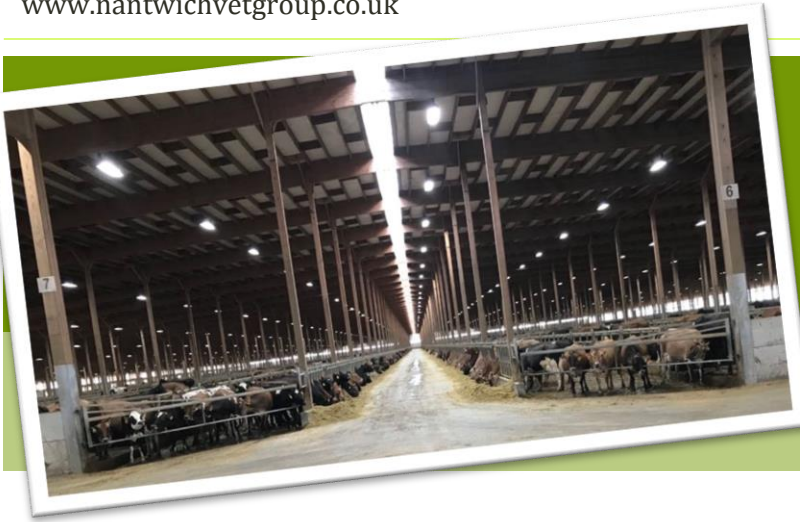
As a practice we want to send our best wishes to Rob & Hilda Clare, Hawksmoor Farm following their herd sale last month. Over the last 50 years the Hawksmoor Herd have won multiple awards (Champion Herd in Shropshire Holstein Club 7 years running, Master Breeders and many individual cow show winners to name a few....). This is a real testament to the excellent management, hard work and dedication of the farm team. All the best for the future!



Photo courtesy of Alison Stevenson

A US perspective

This month **Michael Wilkinson** shares some thoughts on calf and heifer rearing from his recent trip to the US.



At the beginning of October I was lucky enough to travel to the US for the third time to visit dairies. After driving 2500 miles, seeing farms amounting to 100,000 cows and countless amounts of cheeseburgers and fries, I came back rejuvenated and keen to share ideas ('annoying' and 'dangerous' are two of the words routine clients have called it so far!). But I also return with the same opinion as I had previously – yes, these US guys are good (and we made a point of visiting the best) but in the UK we are certainly not far behind and that gap is getting smaller!

Like the UK they have had three tough years of low milk prices, with theirs seemingly even slower to improve. The advantage of BST is a distant memory with some herds losing over 7L/cow/day since its ban. While this has caused a record numbers of dairies to decide to pack up as they have had enough of losing money, others have realised the inefficiencies that BST had masked, and with improved fertility and cow comfort they are slowly getting back to yields they were achieving previously.

We visited three dairies averaging over 50 L/cow/day with no BST, ranging from 650 to 1800 cows. All had varied opinions on how they were achieving these yields, from genetics to nutrition to management, but for me all shared

one thing in common – an overwhelming attention to detail, doing everything feasible to improve the welfare and comfort of the cow. Youngstock were extremely well grown, lame cows were almost impossible to find and clamp management and feed presentation deserved a Michelin star. I'm by no means saying we can all do 50L, nor do we all want to, but all of us on the trip took home ideas, so I thought I would share a couple.

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For those of you who are TDSG suppliers still upset with the new rules against housing calves individually: one of the three farms shared their recent change in calf housing experiences with no prompting at all. To say they were doing things well previously would be an understatement. Every single calf received 4L of pasteurised colostrum within 45 minutes of birth. Calves were then fed pasteurised whole milk three times daily, tested for % solids and corrected with a protein balancer powder for consistency. Average weaning weights at 10 weeks old were over 100kg. After reading the research on calf behaviour when

housed together compared to individually they decided to house calves in pairs nine months ago. Initially individual hutches were combined, though both calves often chose to lie together in the same hutch. Some health and growth benefits were so obvious from the outset and, adamant of the effects pre-weaning growth has on future performance and milk production, they invested thousands in larger hutches shown in the picture below. A gate separates the pair for the first three days simply to make training to drink from a bucket easier, and then the gate is removed. The competition and companionship from the pen mate accelerates starter intake with calves much more confident whilst on milk and also post-weaning when mixed in larger groups. They assured us nothing else changed with regard to calf feeding.



Their feeding regime was already there to get consistent growth rates of 1kg/day. Now calves are regularly weaned 10 weeks old at 125kgs (growth rates averaging over 1.2kg/day). For anyone who is regularly weighing youngstock, you will appreciate how difficult this is to achieve! Those UK farmers who were on the trip thought their own calves did pretty well, but these calves were HUGE and their attention to detail with feeding and cleanliness was an eye-opener to us all.

So what else are they doing to achieve yields over 10L higher than we are?

It can be quite easy to 'cheat' and I always say milk/cow/day is quite a dangerous KPI to chase and compare. High cull rates definitely help. Having lots of heifers coming through allows for more selective culling and enables a higher yield cut off, increasing the herd average. But replacement heifers still need to have the ability to milk high yields, and these two points highlight areas that have started to cause me concern here in the UK.

Rearing heifers is expensive but, contrary to belief, it's not any cheaper across the pond. Many of us have been told to use more beef semen as the calves are of high value and provide a good secondary income, especially during times of low milk prices. What worries me is some herds are now seeing the effects of having a lack of replacements: there is pressure to keep non-profitable cows in the herd, and finding heifers for purchase that are of the same quality as their own is increasingly difficult. It's a tough one to balance with the 4-5 year cycles of high and low milk prices we are becoming familiar with and then a dry summer like we have had ruining any forage stocks.

For those who are rearing your own replacements: we need to grow them properly. How many of you have heard consultants advise lately to reduce your age at first calving? I fully agree with this, but they should go on to say "but calve them down at the same weight as you are currently." Many of our herds have aimed at this reduction over the past couple of years. Many herds are now averaging 24, 23 or even 22 months old at first calving. Some of these heifers go on to milk well but A LOT are failing to reach their potential and reach a peak yield were they should be. Fig 1 (right) shows the persistence of a typical heifer's lactation curve compared with subsequent lactations. Peak yield should be reached by 90DIM (later than multiparous cows, which is commonly around 50DIM) and heifers tend to maintain this peak yield longer than cows. If something prevents them from milking to potential in the first 60 days, their yield won't increase later on. The peak yield they achieve is where they stay at or fall from throughout.

"Reduce your age at first calving...but calve them down at the same weight you are currently."

There is a further correlation between the % mature cow bodyweight (ie. 3+ lactation at 100DIM) a heifer calves at and the % mature cow peak yield the heifer will reach. So a heifer that calves at 60% of your mature cow BW will reach 60% of your mature cow peak yield. The target is to calve heifers down at 83% mature cow BW. But now all too often, with breeding heifers earlier to lower age at first calving, many heifers are served too light and often fail to continue growth whilst in-calf, which can make a difference on total first lactation yields of 1000-2000L. What is also then interesting is those that don't milk well in their

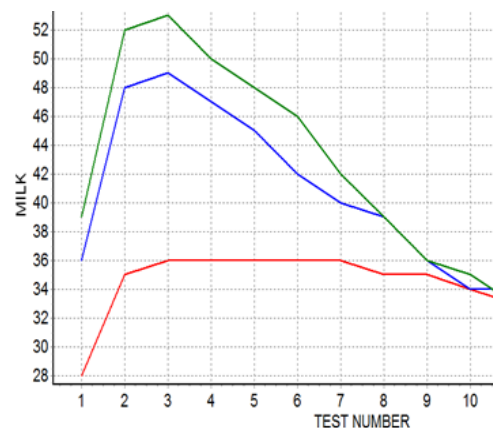


Fig1: Lactation curve variation by lactation number. Red= heifers, Blue =2nd lactation, green=3+ lactation

first lactation more than likely sub-perform in their second.

Aiming to calve heifers earlier is completely right, but just keep in mind what weight we are calving these girls down at. Weighing at strategic times (i.e. birth, weaning, pre-bulling and calving) may prevent some costly breeding decisions or mistakes.

It is probably a good thing that I have ran out of space but if you are interested in my new thoughts on why some of us should possibly be feeding whole milk, use of IVF/embryo transfer to improve genetics commercially and other ideas on nutrition and cow comfort we learned while away feel free to ask...





Vets Mobile Numbers

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John Yarwood	07814879109
Stuart Russell	07770448179
Peter Duncalfe	07717780604
Laura Donovan	07800647608
Steven Crowe	07891843694
Mike Wilkinson	07866257014
Jake Lawson	07891843573
Amy Cox	07966833870
Sarah Williamson	07812173942
Joe Mitchell	07773342345

Colostrum feeding a lesson from suckler calves

Most of you will have heard one (or more) of us bang on at some point about the importance of colostrum management for establishing the immunity of newborn calves. Getting colostrum into a calf of adequate quantity (4L) and quality (easily measured with a colostrometer) quickly (within 6h) is vital to their health, growth and future productivity.

Failure of passive transfer (FPT) can potentially double the likelihood of death or antibiotic treatment in calves. In short, that first 6h window of a calf's life can make or break it.

FPT is extremely common in dairy calves, and a recent study carried out by the DHHPS (associated with Edinburgh Vet School) on over 1100 calf blood samples (to measure antibody levels) showed that it is also a big problem in suckler calves too.

- 👤 1 in 7 calves had complete FPT (no colostrum or got it too late).
- 👤 1 in 3 calves had partial FPT (insufficient quantity or quality).
- 👤 Calve that manually fed often had FPT - so there's much we can do to improve how we help calves that need it.
- 👤 Calves born with assistance (even a 'gentle pull') or that don't have a strong suck reflex by 10 mins after birth have an increased risk of FPT.

It's really easy to get your vet to do a quick check on the effectiveness of your colostrum management through testing calves, and then be able to improve the start they get accordingly. It's their future (and yours) that is at stake!



BVD Stamp It Out Scheme



We have already held two initial BVD meetings to introduce the BVD Stamp It Out scheme to our farmers. There are two further meetings coming up this month, with a limit of 20 spaces for each – contact Laura Donovan if you are interested. These meetings will be followed up by an on farm visit, and some herd testing (RDPE funded). If you would like to book for one of the remaining meetings this autumn please get in contact with Laura Donovan.

Tuesday 13th November

Sarah Williamson discusses calf health

Tuesday 27th November

External speaker Tom Greenham, Advanced Milking

ALL MEETINGS 11am – 2pm (lunch included)

@ Nantwich Equine Centre, Hurleston CW5 6BU



"@NantwichFarmVet"