

## SAVING MONEY IN THE LEAD UP TO MATING

Mating is a time of year when animal health costs are at their highest and in the current financial climate we know cutting costs is going to be high on the agenda for most farmers. What we don't want is this affecting the farms performance and undoing any gains made in the last few years. So how do you achieve the impossible and save money without losing performance? Here are some points to focus on that are cheap but still can offer great results:

- **Premating bloods** cost between \$300-400 and aren't a necessity **IF** you haven't made any changes in regards to fertiliser or minerals in your herd and have a good history of blood results leading into mating from the last few years
- **Metrichecking** is something that should not be avoided as it will cost you more in the long run if dirty cows are left untreated. However you don't necessarily need to do the whole herd if you have been keeping good records. If you have, then concentrate on your At-Risk cows (see article in this newsletter). Also, this is something you can do yourself (with a bit of practice) and get the vet to treat/check your suspicious cases or even treat yourself if you are comfortable passing a catheter through the cervix. A metrichecker can be purchased from us and a quick demo will have you on your way!
- **Tail painting** at 35 days prior to mating and recording these pre-mating heats will avoid unnecessary CIDR use in cycling cows. Topping up tailpaint regularly will also help pick up those suspect cows. You can use a different colour for late calvers to give them a bit more time to cycle before jumping in with non-cycler treatments. Tailpaint costs \$15 a litre and will do up to 80 cows (that's 20 cents a cow!) compared to Kamars or Estrotect at over \$2.20.
- **Spending time** watching your cows is the cheapest way to get them cycling this year, not just in the shed but also out in the paddock. Paddock checks are best done 2 hours after morning milking and again in early afternoon when the feed in the paddocks has been grazed down.
- **Iodine trough treatment** ensures stronger heats. This should be started 30 days pre PSM and at a dose of 40ml/100 cows daily.
- A shot of **Vitamin B12** (+/- selenium: talk to us first) is very cheap & always worth doing a few weeks before mating.
- **Record keeping!** Attention to detail is always important but even more important when there are dollars at stake. Observe and record. It costs you nothing but a little time.



And finally remember well fed cows cycle early!

Cows lose condition between calving and mating due to their daily appetite/intake taking several more weeks than production to peak after calving. This means that for around 7 weeks post calving (can be longer if not fed appropriately) your cows will be 'milking off their backs'. If your cows are below BCS 4 at mating or have lost more than 1 BCS between mating and calving this can greatly affect their chance of cycling naturally prior to mating. It is too late now to change BCS at calving but to reduce the numbers of non-cyclers at PSM a focus should be put on meeting your cows' energy demands through this crucial period.

To do this without buying in more feed stocking rate can be lowered (reducing your herd numbers by 5% can allow an extra 1kgDM/cow/day without affecting overall feed demand on farm) or you can reduce your cows energy demand by putting your lighter cows and younger cows on once a day (OAD) milking. To gain a benefit from this it should be done from at least 6 weeks prior to mating right up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of mating. Ideally these OAD cows would be grazed as a separate mob and fed the same as the rest of the herd making only one trip to the shed, which means less walking and more time in the paddock eating.

Now would be the perfect time to body condition score your herd to help identify these lighter cows which need looking after coming into mating so give us a call to discuss your BCS options.

## At-Risk Cows - Still Worth Treating

While you may decide that you don't want to spend money Metrichecking your whole herd this season you should still be checking your At-Risk cows at least a month before mating.

You know the ones; cows that had:

Retained cleanings  
Dead calf  
Twins  
Prolapse

Difficult or assisted calving  
Milk fever  
Vaginal discharge

The evidence is compelling that these cows, if left un-treated, will be up to 25% less likely to conceive than their herd mates. The evidence is equally compelling that if we can examine these cows and treat them at least 4 weeks before mating starts, we can reduce this percentage to negligible levels and give them an equal chance of getting in calf to AB.

So please, note these cows down as you see them and put them up for examination 4-6 weeks prior to mating. In fact, the earlier we treat them (within reason), the better the chances of getting them in calf. Metri-clean is designed to be used from 2-4 weeks after calving (this gives the uterus time to reduce in size). Early identification, good record keeping and treatment with Metri-clean will vastly improve your cows' chances of staying in your herd for another season.

## Why You Should Still Treat Your Non-Cyclers This Season

“I know you don’t want to, but we have to talk.”

That’s a sentence to send a shiver up any man’s spine but I’m not talking relationships this time; I’m talking anoestrus cows.

You don’t have to be Einstein to realise that mating is less than 2 months away & possibly the single most important animal health expenditure decision you make is looming with it.

So what to do about your non-cyclers? I bet a lot of you have decided “I can’t afford to do it this season” but **the truth is you can’t afford not to.**

Not treating your non-cyclers at the right time will cost you money and will also impact on your income stream next season (and the season after) because remember the use of Cidrs is all about gaining extra days in milk rather than simply making a cow cycle. **So you still need to treat non-cyclers and this year it’s more important than ever to do it at the right time.**



The good people who make Cidrs have put together a terrific App that you can download if you own an iPad or iPhone (Search in the App store using the keyword ‘Cidr ‘ & the CIDR® Return on Investment Calculator application for iPad should appear for you to download). It is pre-loaded with default figures from last season so the first thing you have to do is change the value of the payout & things like value

of an extra AB calf and then plug in the cost of Cidrsynch at \$42 and Ovsynch (noncyclers without the cidr) at \$25. This will then give you the cost benefit analysis for the use of noncyclers programs.

The single biggest point to take from this is that, for most of you, the only time treatment with Cidrs will give a positive return on investment is if you use them **7-10 days before the start of mating.**

If you do it then based on a \$3.85 payout & average daily production of 1.4 kgMS/cow/day you will get a return per cow (including treatment costs) of around \$38. If you wait until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> week you’ll probably make a small return of around \$4.50. But, if you wait to treat noncyclers until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> round it will actually cost you \$20 more than you make in extra milk next season so the message is “do it early or not at all”. For OvSynch the return if done 7-10 days early is around \$24.

The really sobering news is that if you are a 50/50 sharemilker the best you can hope for this season when treating your non-cyclers is to break even if you treat 7-10 days before the start of mating. However you have to see this as an insurance policy; to not lose too many days in milk this coming season so when the payout does rebound your cows are ready to take advantage of it and you’re not sitting back at square one trying to regain this lost ground. As anyone who has gained weight before will tell you, it’s a lot easier going backwards than it is going forwards!

If the numbers of non-cyclers before PSM scares you then you can be more selective on who to treat. We know that on most farms the older cows (as long as they are in reasonable condition) will cycle within an acceptable time frame so it’s a fair decision to say “let’s forget about the older cows this season & just treat our 2, 3 & 4 year olds”. Then perhaps you could also look at the cows themselves & decide “when I look at their PWs & BWs why am I treating the bottom 10-20% at all? Maybe I should leave them & they either get in calf on their own or get culled”. Just concentrate on the young good cows & treat them. Talk to us about your options before you make a decision that might cost you a lot more down the track. I’m sure your farm advisors are probably saying similar things. You can be selective but you still need to treat enough cows early to keep your calving spread solid. The term “damage limitation” springs to mind this season.

**The key message is that whatever group of cows you eventually decide to treat, do them early. Keep detailed records, tail paint early & brush up on heat detection well before you need to start writing down tag numbers - all these things are in your control; the payout isn’t.**

So if you ring & book in your non-cyclers after your known mating start date we may advise you to forget it for this season because it’s not going to help you make any money. If you insist then we will gladly take your money but that’s exactly what we will be doing: taking your money.

